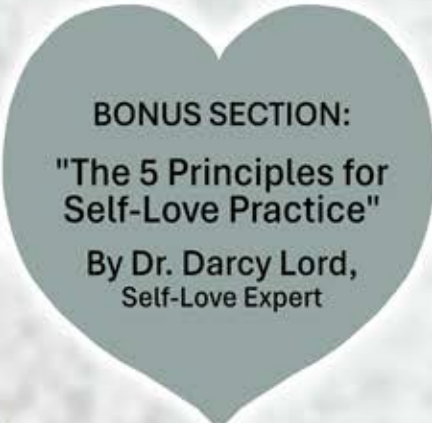




# INTENTION OF LOVE

A Poetry Anthology



**BONUS SECTION:**  
"The 5 Principles for  
Self-Love Practice"  
By Dr. Darcy Lord,  
Self-Love Expert



**Foreword  
by  
James Crews**

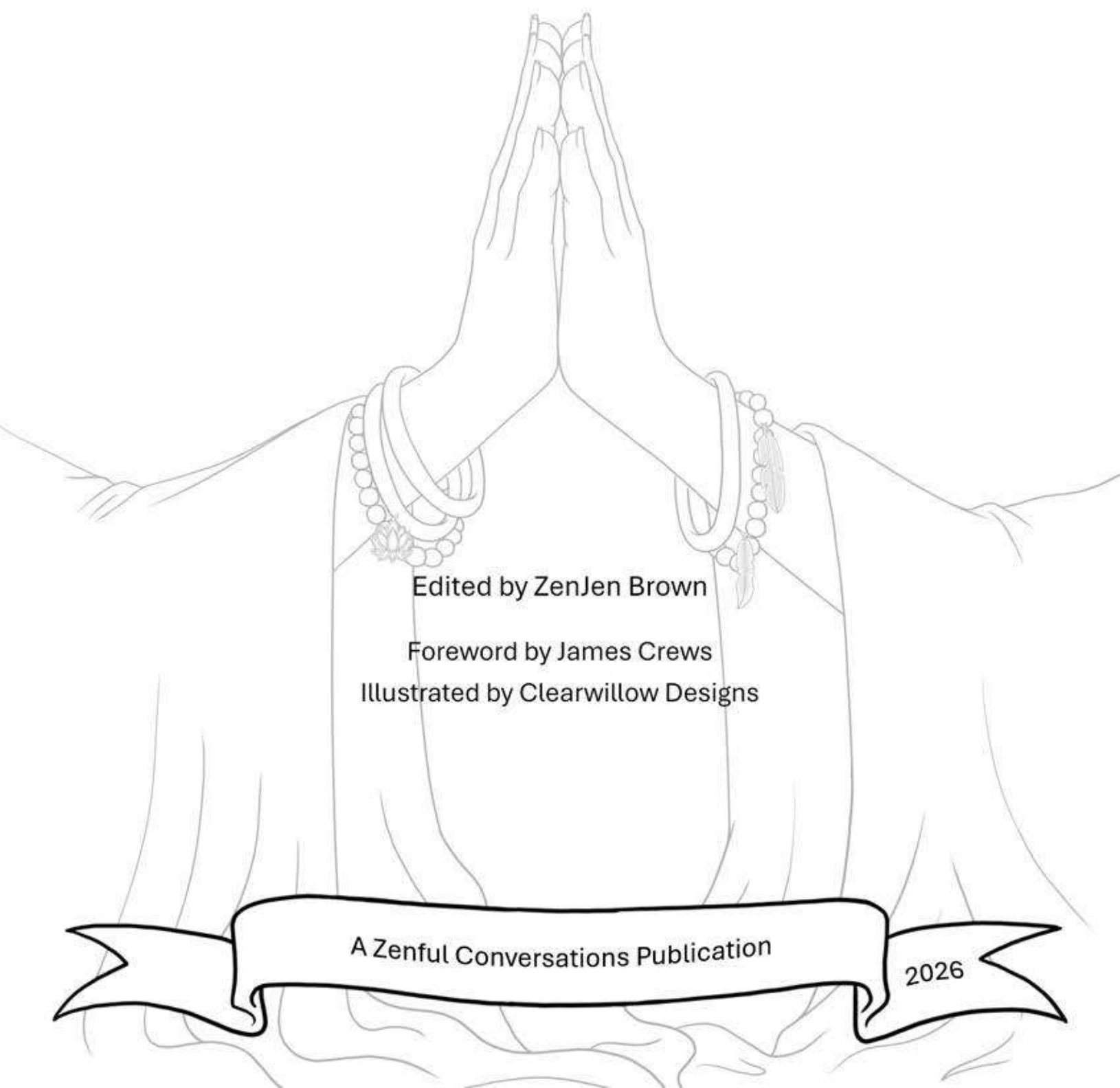


**Edited by ZenJen Brown**

**Illustrated by Clearwillow Designs**

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A Zenful Conversations Publication

2026

## Special Thanks

A special thanks to Clear Willow Designs, aka Carra Leigh, the freelance artist who has been creating artwork and supporting my projects for over fifteen years, and I truly wouldn't be able to do any of this without her.

Clear Willow offers artwork that is customized to her client's wants and needs. From logos to illustrations for fiction and personal gifts, each project is handled with care and attention to detail.

Her artistry, support, and steady presence helped make this book possible. All original artwork on the front and back covers, as well as within these pages, was created with love by Clear Willow Designs.

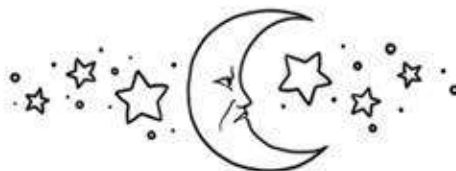
A sincere thank you to you, Carra!


Fun fact: Carra and I share the same birthday!

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**BONUS SECTION: The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice by  
Dr. Darcy Lord, Self-Love Expert**





# foreword

by James Crews

## Love Poems Are Everywhere

The oldest love poem ever found, known as “Love Song for Shu-Sin,” was written 4,000 years ago, carved in a tablet of clay about the size of a cell phone. Visitors flock each year to the Mesopotamia wing of the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient just to marvel at this small piece of history, to lay eyes on Sumerian cuneiform preserved across the millenia. But we don’t need to travel any further than our own homes, our own hectic, imperfect daily lives, to find examples of love poems just as potent as the one on this tablet. The notes my husband and I leave on the counter for each other are tiny love poems, as are the last greeting cards my mother ever sent to me, written in ballpoint, in her shaky scrawl. I still have the last grocery list my father ever made for me thirty years ago just before he died, written on the back of an old envelope with his usual misspellings: “Hamberger, Pickels, Spaggetti noodles.” It is one of my most prized possessions. We believe our love for each other, and our love of the world, requires everlasting symbols of devotion, things that can last the test of time. Yet consider all the tender gestures that have stayed with you over the years offered by family, friends, and strangers alike. I remember, in the surreal moments after my father’s sudden death, when he was finally gone, one of the doctors on duty pulling me aside, and with his strong Irish accent, offering to sit down and talk if I needed to. “We knew this was coming,” I said, already trying on my mask of bravery. “It’s always painful to lose someone, no matter what,” the doctor said, and I have carried the permission of his words with me for decades like one of the finest love poems ever spoken.

As every one of the poems in this aptly named collection reveals, it is not the extravagance of the gift or gesture that gives it staying power, but instead the intention of love with which it is offered. Editor ZenJen Brown, from the very start, invites us in this anthology to come as we are and rest in the sacrament of a love that, as Debora Tremont puts it in “Skywatcher,” “underlies everything,” perhaps even the faces of our perceived enemies. As we read through the poems gathered here with a wide-open heart, we are encouraged to pause and reflect after each piece, asking ourselves how we might integrate these countless insights into our own lives. Mostly, the poems in *Intention of Love* point to just how much we need each other—for support, growth, guidance, and a greater clarity. In the poem, “Love in Plain Sight,” Marjorie Moorhead asks: “Are we stepping into a dark cave? If so, let’s step in together./You be my candle; I’ll be yours.” It’s clear we have entered a period of great transition and uncertainty, and while this fraught time may be marked by the darkness of terror and fear, I also find daily sources of light when I choose to see with the eyes of the heart. Like the poets gathered here, I find love poems everywhere I look, whenever I choose to turn toward the “pockets of warmth,” as Stacy Strawn describes them so well. Let’s be a candle for each other as we walk through our days together, keeping our own flames lit. Let’s reshape and re-dream this world with the deeper intention of love that costs nothing to generate, and nothing to give.



# Introduction

by ZenJen Brown

Hi everyone!

Welcome to *INTENTION OF LOVE!*

I'm so happy to share this anthology with you!

This collection is offered with deep love and honest intention, the same way I try to live my life.

My hope is that you feel the presence of every heart in these pages... the sense of community and love we share... and the strength of these voices, reminding us that we're all in this together.

Every poem that was submitted is included here. No voice was left out. I spent time with each piece... really sitting with them... meditating with them... and in the end... everything that was offered found its place.

You'll find honesty here. Open, human expression. Some pieces might ask something of you... some invite reflection... some may stir emotion... some may feel tender... others may just sit quietly beside you.

There's no need to rush. No need to understand everything. You don't have to do anything with any of it. Let your own heart guide the experience... and pause when you need to.

My poem opens this anthology... *A SACRED PAUSE*. Before anything else, this felt like the place to start. Softly, with the breath.

At the end, there is a bonus section! *Dr. Darcy Lord* has generously shared *The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice*. It feels like a beautiful way to gently close this collection.

It has been an honor to hold these words... to care for them along the way... and now, to pass them on to you.

From my heart to yours... thank you for your trust.

In peace, love & community,

ZenJen Brown xoxo

# A Sacred Pause ZenJen Brown

---

Come as you are.  
Take a rest.

Close your eyes.  
Find a soft breath.

Breathe in love,  
exhale peace.

Take a sacred pause.  
Let yourself be.

Hold this moment of stillness.



“There is a voice that doesn’t use words. Listen.”

- Rumi

# Because Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

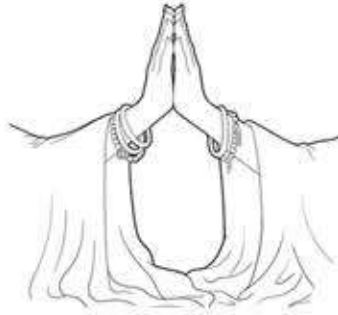
So I can't save the world —  
can't save even myself,  
can't wrap my arms around  
every frightened child, can't  
foster peace among nations,  
can't bring love to all who  
feel unlovable.

So I practice opening my heart  
right here in this room and being gentle  
with my insufficiency. I practice  
walking down the street heart first.  
And if it is insufficient to share love,  
I will practice loving anyway.  
I want to converse about truth,  
about trust. I want to invite compassion  
into every interaction.

One willing heart can't stop a war.  
One willing heart can't feed all the hungry.  
And sometimes, daunted by a task too big,  
I tell myself what's the use of trying?  
But today, the invitation is clear:  
to be ridiculously courageous in love.  
To open the heart like a lilac in May,  
knowing freeze is possible  
and opening anyway.  
To take love seriously.  
To give love wildly.  
To race up to the world  
as if I were a puppy,  
adoring and unjaded,  
stumbling on my own exuberance.  
To feel the shock of indifference,  
of anger, of cruelty, of fear,  
and stay open. To love as if it matters,  
as if the world depends on it.

# Because Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

*continued*



Perhaps, like me, you sometimes read the news and feel discouraged, despondent, and utterly inadequate and impotent to help create change. I wrote this poem for myself as a peptalk, to help me come alive and to remind myself how I most want to show up in the world. Basically, it's a love manifesto.

Write your own love manifesto—what are your intentions, your motives, your promises you want to make to yourself and to the world? How do you want to show up? Perhaps start with what you can't do and move toward what you can do—what do you have to bring to the aching world?

# Everything Hangs on Love Tammy Iralu

Everything hangs on love  
like the door on its hinge.  
Everything rests on love  
like the water strider  
on the pond ripples.

Like a carpenter planing  
a plank of wood,  
love makes the rough way  
smooth.

Like the sun at daybreak  
shining on the battlefield,  
love never gives up.

The sky is most beautiful  
as it tackles the dark—  
when light bends,  
curving like the arc  
of red-tailed hawk's wing.  
Daybreak or day's end,  
the horizon pools  
with color oozing like fruit  
ripening on the branch.

Though the shadow  
falls on the tree,  
when the shade  
lifts her wing,  
the leaf is still green,  
and tender, and ready  
to breathe, and  
bear light.

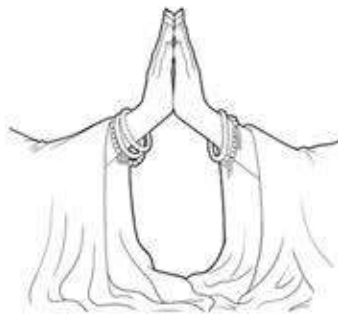
# Everything Hangs on Love Tammy Iralu

*continued*

A few years ago, I was visiting family in Nagaland, India. My niece had embroidered several verses from 1 Corinthians 13 and framed them. In these verses, the apostle Paul, author of 1 Corinthians, writes that “without love, I am nothing.” He also writes that love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres, and that love never fails. I realized that I had not reflected on 1 Corinthians 13 in a while! After reflecting, I made my own list of metaphors for love. In this poem, I order the metaphors from small things—a hinge, a pond—to large things—the sun, and light.

By choosing to do “small things with great love,” as Mother Teresa encourages, I can be a small hinge that opens to love and connection. Relationships between nations, between family members, break down. But love perseveres and trusts and works for the good of all.

Another meaningful metaphor for love is found in the Tao Te Ching. In this text from ancient China, love is compared to water, a natural force that nourishes all and flows around all obstacles.



Make a list of metaphors that convey the transformative power of love, or list moments when you experienced a deep sense of love. Next, choose the metaphors, or moments, that speak to you most deeply and arrange them in an order or sequence. Move toward a turning point or closing image that opens to the possibility of connection through love.

# Wonderlust Morag Elizabeth Humble

Let me today hold on to wonder,  
to find the first shoots of spring  
emerging from the dirt and crouch  
down low beside them, stroking  
them gently one by one, feeling  
their faint furriness. Let me love  
each one like I was three again.  
And then let me be amazed  
by the line of ants marching  
along the sidewalk at the edge  
of the grass, heading towards  
that spill from the neighbor's  
green bin that smells of moldy  
bread and stale coffee and  
things that make my nose crinkle.  
Let me look up from the ants only  
When I hear the honk of the geese  
passing overhead or the conk-la-reee  
of the redwing blackbirds flitting  
among the reeds and the cattails  
around the pond across the road,  
and as I watch them let me skip  
and hop and wonder what it would  
feel like to fly, to let go of my human  
body and lift off from the path, from  
all that is heavy and unfeathered.  
Let me fill a pocket with treasures  
from the day – a small smooth  
speckled pebble, a magnolia petal  
so soft and fragrant, a sequin  
lost from something fancy – and  
let me lay them out one by one  
on the window ledge before bedtime,  
kissing each one like I was three again  
and thanking them for finding me.

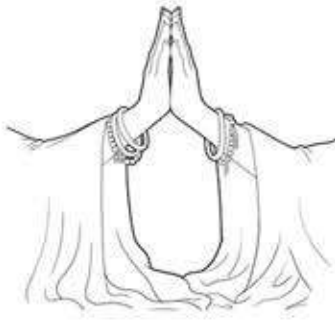
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# Wonderlust Morag Elizabeth Humble

*continued*

And then let me dream dreams  
of wonder, and wonder what  
wonders tomorrow will bring.



Take a few moments to think about a time when you were filled with wonder. Write something to try to recreate the experience, using as many senses as you can.

# Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

Sound of a voice from my youth  
Tender and high key  
Whisper of sunshine  
Mid December and my torso exposed  
Spot of blue and red wavelengths  
Little prism portal  
Imagination that stirs  
Hope and manic energy  
To birth  
To begin again  
To pour love into some inanimate thing  
Sound of the birds as the sky burns  
bright orange  
Fire and light  
Light and the reaching through  
Heart shaped shape of grass under melting snow  
Heart shaped shell and stone  
Watercolor from your hand  
Poem read aloud  
Comedy skit  
Shelf of toys  
Ones you built  
Intricate puzzles of creation  
Piecing together strength after loss  
Blooms in tiny custard jars  
Reused glass  
To hold beauty and honor the dead  
Books to read  
This winter I said  
Scholarships  
Poetry and self help  
Gifts of green from afar  
Paint layered  
Resin freezing nature in pendants

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# Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

*continued*

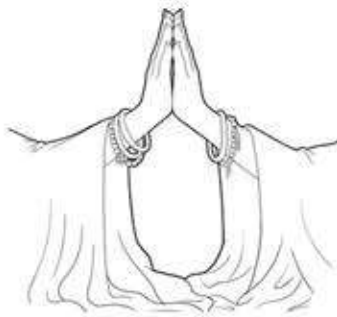
Window view  
To you  
Close  
So close  
I don't even have to walk or travel or cry  
Part the curtains and be with you  
Aurora we stumbled upon  
After years of want  
Home cooked food  
All my meals in bed  
My own shower  
My own dress  
Black and green  
To cloak my grief  
The tattoos of you I wrap around my core  
Thread from a geshle  
Connections to humans across the globe  
Moments of still quiet  
Smell of a rose  
Soft pink  
Like her middle name  
Grounding on the vast mother  
The whole  
Accepting the unity  
Numinous  
As I peer through evergreen to moose  
Mysterious love  
Hand beading a bracelet  
Sending cards  
Telephoning into the beyond  
Through slowing  
Poem and handmade love

# Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

*continued*

My poem “Pockets of Warmth”, is a reflection on the ordinary and numinous moments in daily life and nature where I am able to feel into my human heart, to acknowledge all the specific sensual moments that allow me to feel the emotion of love in my body. I pondered things that allowed me to sense into my body grounding, connecting, feeling of awe, feeling what it is for a heart to be opening, and the warmth of being embodied.

The most awe inspiring have been times where I have peeked into wild nature and felt privy to its potent energy. In the example of the moose, I hiked miles and miles in solitude in a vast wilderness area of southwest Colorado. Instead of summiting a peak, or chasing a certain end point or view, I found a slow pace and walked with eyes and heart open through the wild land. Silent. Watching. Listening. I came across two moose grazing. I bowed to watch in awe. In this moment I felt a profound connection and love.



Reflect back on one or many things or moments that have served to open your heart.

When have you dropped into such slow mindfulness that the entire universe opened in front of you, you were able to experience the numinous, and see into some infinite bliss larger than the individual story of you? What helps you feel love in your body?

# Today's Agenda Dennise Gackstetter

I found it in the back pocket  
of an old pair of jeans  
into which I no longer can wrestle myself,  
no matter how hard I try.  
The gap between button and buttonhole  
reminiscent of the years  
since I last wore those pants  
and the new knowledge  
there will be no simple closure.

Carefully I opened  
the casually folded paper,  
which revealed a list  
of all the important things  
to do that day,  
words scrawled in purple ink  
between torn edges—  
    bank deposit  
    grocery-berries, yogurt, batteries, cat food  
    pay bills  
    post office

Here in my hand  
a small written history,  
so essential, so incomplete.

I wonder about the in-between items not listed—  
    notice the dappled light dancing across the parking lot tarmac  
    smile at the man behind you as you wait together in line  
    smile at the cashier as she reaches for the berries  
    put the Love stamp on the envelope and mail the letter to Mom.

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# Today's Agenda Dennise Gackstetter

*continued*

I wonder how usual become exceptional,  
how ordinary becomes divine.

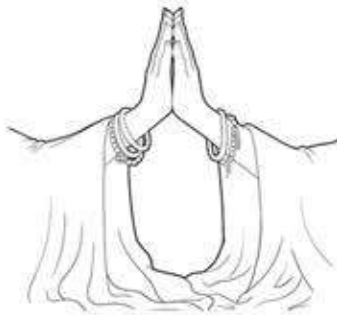
Notice.

Smile.

Love.

These are items on today's agenda.

I'm always delighted to find random scraps of paper with notes or lists on them. I think of them as communications from the divine asking me to examine their possibility or meaning. I often find poems waiting within the words.



What ordinary items are on your agenda today? How might the divine be hidden in that list?

# Fill My Cup Michelle Bentcliff

“Inside our hearts there may be only one question: how well did I love?  
Did I choose to see the wonder of each day?” – Richard Brendan

My recent milestone birthday  
triggered trickles of sand in the glass —  
Like the waning moon, it brought reflection  
for what I want to fill my cup in this final phase —

Moments of awe witnessing whales breach,  
Colors of love splashed across the sky,  
Morning birdsong louder than life,  
Sounds of owls hooting good night.

Let me bathe elephants — gaze  
into their eyes to see their soul.  
Feel the power of presence  
observing each miracle of nature.

Fill my cup with gratitude for family focused on love,  
Camaraderie with our cherished friends,  
Connection to caring communities,  
Kindling kindness to create ripples of joy.

To know I touch hearts, make a difference, inspire people.  
To love and be loved is my greatest wish for the rest of this life.



Think of a time you experienced something so deeply you'll always  
remember it. Write about the sensory details, how it made you feel,  
any lingering impact.

What can we do to help heal the world?  
Peace in presence is passed on, gratitude lightens our heart, kindness  
and love radiate ripples. Find comfort and joy where we can.

# Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

have you ever had a dream so  
beautiful to imagine

hi hello  
happy to be in this  
wave adventure

a quiet beach with no more than six  
people in the water  
waves look fierce

hard to swim for a second  
hard to land on foot

this water holds nothing easy

*I love you*  
and that Waimanalo rock  
with the gigantic amber stud on the beach

*I love you*  
and me as a child jumping waves on my feet  
leaping and pressing hard into the sea sand

embracing waves  
and the big job they hold

surviving waves do tricks  
make hearts pound

they have arms and fire  
no one sees this

look up be calm  
watch the struggle of the universe  
listen to the next electric breeze in the air

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# Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

*continued*

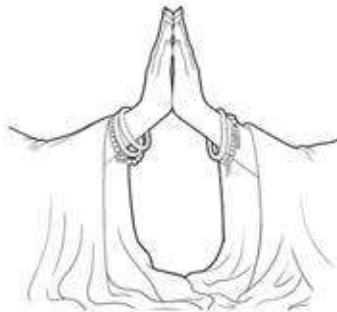
hear my mind play around  
finally forgetting ugly news

waves smile like  
half-moons and bananas  
cactus too  
unspoken in this loud world

in this ceremony I float on my back  
dream I'm skydiving

toes point to shore

a little gray bird stares at the waves  
always preferring one breath



# Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

*continued*

Bow to Waves grew from a memory of swimming in Waimanalo, feeling both small and alive in the ocean's vastness. Writing it was an attempt to capture the sacredness of presence, the body in motion, and love that extends beyond people—love for nature, memory, and being itself. I wanted the lines to move like waves: sometimes quiet, sometimes crashing, always alive. The playful imagery—half-moons, bananas, cactus—reflects the unexpected ways joy and wonder appear when we pay attention.



Think of a place or moment where you felt fully alive, even if just for second. Explore who or what you loved in that moment, beyond people: the world, your younger self, a rock, a wave, or the air you breathed.

Start with any of this lines:

This is where loves learns to...

Have you ever had a dream...

Waves smile like...

In this ceremony, I...

# Skywatcher Debora Tremont

---

I am a skywatcher  
a cloud diviner,  
like an ancient seer  
searching the skies for evidence  
seeing words of meaning or stark prediction  
scribed by images of air and water.

Today the air is chilly, bright  
skies are brilliant blue  
cloud-scratch a mere implication  
of angels' wings, poised  
for possible descent into our lives.

Could they clarify our need for peace,  
startle us into a love that underlies everything,  
call us to somehow love enemies  
into friends?



Mary Oliver's three-part imperative, Pay attention. Be astonished. Write about it. has deeply influenced my daily writing practice of nearly five years. Oliver reminds me to be aware in the moment, wherever I might be. Recently, I wrote the beginning of this poem while on the porch of a restaurant, waiting for a friend. I was thinking about the unrest in our country and the world, and when I looked up to watch the clouds, the answer started to unfold.

Watch the everyday events around you, like the pattern of clouds in the sky. Let the clouds tell you where to go next.

# Love in Plain Sight Marjorie Moorhead

Are we entering a dark cave? If so, let's step in together.  
You be my candle; I'll be yours. We will generate warmth,  
follow light we make for each other.  
Let any darkness bring us closer.

Snow, a cold blanket, can sparkle once fallen.  
It just needs to be open, in conversation with sun  
or a full moon and stars.  
Let love be revealed. Let's welcome the magical,  
have faith in mystery. Not be diminished by misery—  
it is just a segment of this journey.

Start with incantation; like a bird, sing it sweetly:  
I want to find the love in front of me.



This poem was originally written as a new year's wish, heading into 2025. Sadly, it must have felt like we were entering a dark cave. The poem tries to deal with that by encouraging loving relationship, one where we can get through darkness together and be open to love, "the magical", mystery... We are stronger together, and there is love in front of us.

When have you been feeling low, or frightened, but then notice a glimmer of hope/light? What brought that into view, and how might those gifted glimpses be strengthened?

# embracing our differences stella graham-landau

i am drawn to our differences  
the melody of the words we use  
whole worlds of citizens on a street corner  
different palates  
different celebrations  
different names for those we love  
different clothes different colors  
different permissions to express who we are  
you make my world larger  
showing me alternate ways to navigate life  
expanding my mind  
stretching my margins  
to make room for nuance  
the shape of our eyes and our lips  
the shade of our skin  
the texture of our hair  
how we are much alike  
quick to hug  
quick to hold one another's hand  
when we meet  
wanting smiles to greet us  
and quietness to surround us  
as we pause together  
to marvel at the sunset  
exploding once again  
on the horizon that we share



"What stands in the way of my allowing others to enter my life? Am I scared? Am I exhausted? Am I grieving? Perhaps I've fallen into routines that I'm not aware are keeping me apart. What will help me turn this corner? What might I discover if I take a step toward others?"



You stand on your side,  
bright badges on display.  
The polite picket fence is now barbed,  
wires twisted with sharp opinions.

Baffled by these new decorations  
I come closer to understand, to offer my listening,  
holding a bouquet of daisies I picked on my way here.

Glaring disbelief, or maybe pity for me, crosses your pursed lips.  
Your covered eyes do not land upon me.  
I feel my threat within your air.

We are passing this moment in a lifetime of wonder.  
These flowers will not last, and neither will we be here again.

Beyond our banners and bumperstickers, holding this moment.  
This timeless We, beyond our obvious differences.  
In this - there is nothing to forgive.

I smile without satire or prejudice,  
without the need for you to see me,  
placing two blossoms in the lock on your gate.



Describe a moment or situation when you felt great empathy  
(or the lack of it).

What types of fences have you experienced?

Who would you be if there was no time? Is there an essential quality or  
metaphor for this feeling?

# Miracle of Love in a Time of Deep Division Brenda Wildrick

*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love,  
I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1*

As the year of the snake slithers off to make space  
for the fire horse, I receive the word, unlock,  
and I receive a vision.

I see two rooms.  
Horrible noises emanate from each room –  
shouting, wailing, cursing, screaming,  
shattering, crushing.

Between the two rooms is a land called “Our Common Ground”.  
It was once a lush meadow full of flowers, picnics, and music.  
But poisonous lies have been sown into it.  
Nothing grows here now except sharp barbs.

A fierce wind blows over the land. The sound of the wind  
is like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.  
There is no love. The people do not venture out,  
but stay stuck in their rooms like prisoners.

Deep within each room, there is singing.  
The people gather around the singing  
and warm themselves by its light.  
Within the singing, there is love.

But when people step away from the love,  
when they gather in the doorways of each room,  
they shout at those in the OTHER room –  
You are full of hate! You are evil!

*Continued on next page*



# Miracle of Love in a Time of Deep Division Brenda Wildrick

*continued*

The people know that deep within their own room,  
there is singing, warmth and love,  
but very few know that within the OTHER room,  
there is also singing, warmth, and love.

In the tumultuous year of the fire horse,  
this is the message I share –  
we must unlock love, set it free to fill up each room,  
and let it spill out upon Our Common Ground.

We, the people, have the key to unlock love,  
the key to set ourselves free. When we are free,  
we will work together to expose the poisonous lies,  
we will root them out, we will purify the ground,

we will plant good seeds. Then the singing  
will burst forth from deep inside the rooms, and love  
will embrace all those willing to receive it.



A blessing for reclaiming our shared reality –  
May we all seek truth  
May we all recognize truth  
May we all receive truth . . .  
even if it proves us wrong.

Find a poem with words that appeal to you. Choose some words from the poem that catch your attention, maybe 10 to 15, and write them down the right margin of your page in no particular order. Without deciding what your poem is even going to be about, free write to the end words you wrote down. Enjoy the surprise of what expresses itself through you!

# Intention of Love - The Struggle Cheryl Anderson

---

It allows for courageous acts,  
and empowers one's soul with confidence.

In the battle field of opposition,  
it allows us to defend the weak.

It forces one's foes to respect us, whether the love is born within the child in us,  
or acquired through conscious actions.

Emotional Wounds may appear after time even for the strongest worriers,  
yet we carry on with resilience and good intension as we must.

As an act of self-preservation when the smoke settles and exhaustion sets in,  
we remove our armor slowly for a brief pause.

If our love is strong,  
necessity commands we pick up the sword another day.

However, as we lift our heads from the pillow damaged with deep wounds within,  
we suddenly realize that this has now become our place in the world.

Remaining vigilant for the rest of our lives with the knowledge,  
that intentions of love for all against evil, has now become our divine mandate.

# For Love For Forgiveness Wanda Wilson

---

This is for love for forgiveness  
of the smallest black ants  
for the lack of gratitude in the sun  
for the bright lofty rhythms  
of my own two feet scuffing these dirt trails  
combing boulders  
ledges in the high places  
of wind and water  
carved sentinels glancing  
at my old boots  
keeping pace with the quiet birds  
as heat slides early into my canyon  
away from my ungovernable woes  
together like the nopal hearts  
of beaver-tail cactus  
pinging my mediastinum into rapid sighs  
as epiphany pipes burst  
their fulfillments along these  
14 million year old melted rocks  
as their left over gravelly  
moraines remind me I continue to morn  
the icy rapture of glaciers  
now this cathedral of monoliths and mesas  
expand my passions  
as golden brittlebrush ignites  
the hills the air  
into unexpected honey  
and I wonder how wild  
can much wilder get  
will I sketch bewildered into the ecstasy  
of the tiniest buckwheat floret  
blooming fierce beneath  
this overwhelming sky in

*Continued on next page*

# For Love For Forgiveness Wanda Wilson

*continued*

their fancy petalled red and white  
shining from the late winter rain  
and I wonder  
if I carry this with me  
like the infamous pluck of these smallest black ants  
if I glow loud enough with pollen  
will absolution find me  
as I drift miles in love  
with these desert sweets



I was walking on a 4 mile hike in what's called Monolith Trail in Cerbat Mts. I was so happy and felt love all around me and felt all my sadness and discontent forgiven & fall away. The Spring blooms were beginning and the bees were lovely. Everywhere the air was filled with the honey from yellow Brittlebush. Ah!

Cake  Ellen Rowland

---

A stupid argument and I take it out  
on the egg shells, seize them  
in the palm of my hand and crush,  
tearing the delicate inner lining.

Take it out on the baking chocolate  
still in its wrapper. The recipe calls for  
finely chopped. I slam the bar instead  
again and again against the counter's edge,

crush the beaters into the side of the bowl  
and whip, whip, whip a well of furious flour.  
Rip the baking paper across the metal teeth  
and begin the slow rise of regret, begin to fear  
the cake will be infused with my ire—

yolks curdled, sugar grained, butter gone bad.  
Like the daggered ice crystals that form when  
still in water state, are told they are ugly and hated,  
worthless and unloved, I worry I have sullied  
the crumb, bittered the icing, muddied each layer.

So before I take the first bite, I say, *I'm sorry.*  
*Forgive me. I love you.* Both our mouths are full.  
It is so, so good.

# Cake Ellen Rowland

*continued*

In the 1990s Masaru Emoto, a Japanese businessman and researcher, put forth the claim that water responds to human emotions, words, and intentions on a molecular level. His experiments involved exposing various samples of water to words like “love” or “hate,” labelling the sample with positive or negative messages, playing classical music or blasting heavy metal, directing prayers and positive intentions towards specific samples of water, then freezing them and examining the crystals they formed in ice state.

The samples that received intentions of love and gratitude formed beautifully intricate, symmetrically patterned crystals, while the water exposed to anger, aggressivity, or negative thoughts took on deformities, sharp edges, and chaotic angles. His research supports the idea that intentions, thoughts, and actions of love can indeed have a positive or negative impact on our surroundings, our creations, our relationships, and ourselves. I took this idea, outlined in his book, *The Hidden Messages in Water*, and applied it to the simple act of baking and sharing a cake “with love.” Love as an intentional ingredient.

If our feelings can influence the molecular structure of water, they can impact others in powerful ways. And since the human body is 60% water and 71% of the earth’s surface is covered in water, the ice crystal images open up big questions about how we interact with each other, the natural world, and ourselves from a place of love.



# you can have any word that you want liezel graham

if you are going to use your own words  
to speak about yourself, please  
choose the softest ones that you can find.  
make sure they are gentle, with room inside  
where you can breathe.  
words that give you space to move about in.  
words that you might grow into.  
and it's ok if they don't fit you, yet.  
pick the ones that hang a little higher up on the tree.  
words that make you stretch always smell like grace  
and kindness—the ones that taste the sweetest.  
if you are going to use your own words  
to speak to yourself, please  
remember to use all the words that you are hungry for  
—the words that you have always wanted to hear.  
use all the words that nobody ever gives you.  
let me tell you a secret:  
you are allowed to use any word that you want, claim  
any word for yourself—you really are!  
you may use words like lovely, and clever, kind, and  
happy, wanted and valuable, and even the word beautiful.  
you may stick them all over your life.  
and do you know what else?  
you are even allowed to string them together  
—hang them around your own neck like a treasure  
for everyone to see.  
i love you, and  
i am doing the best that i can, and  
i am worthy of love.  
you are allowed to own any word  
that has ever been spoken by any tongue, human or angel.  
this can be a dangerous thing to do, though.  
so, are you ready?

*Continued on next page*

# you can have any word that you want liezel graham

*continued*

choose well tender-hearted body.  
be careful which ones you pick up to carry home  
in your pocket.  
and if you find words in your heart  
that others have left there without your permission  
—words that don't fit you, words that force you  
to keep your eyes to the ground  
and not look?  
words that smell like fear and shame?  
you are allowed to throw them away, you are allowed  
to forget them.  
you do not have to keep every adjective  
that follows you home.  
they do not teach you this in school, or in church, or even  
in the house where you are born  
into your life.  
over and over, you are allowed to say, no.  
look for words that are ripe with hope, words  
that feel warm in your hands.  
rub them gently into your skin  
until everything about you glows with love.  
until your whole body is a song.  
until your life shines with pure joy.  
you may keep any word that you want.  
you may throw away any word that you don't want.  
can you believe that?  
but first, you have to choose.

# I Want to Live Like an Ear Celeste Boudreaux

How would it be to live like an ear,  
as if my entire purpose was to listen?  
Listening to the person in front of me,  
hanging on their words as if they are  
the last other human left alive on the earth,  
as if my survival depends on their very next utterance,  
as if these are their final words before the shroud?

My other ear will be listening to the Divine.  
What wisdom does Sophia have to impart?  
What voice will she use? Will it be the cardinal's song,  
the distant playground delight of children,  
the green shush of the pear tree's fluttering hands,  
the music of the chimes dancing in the sunlight?  
Let me listen closely to discern layers in their message.

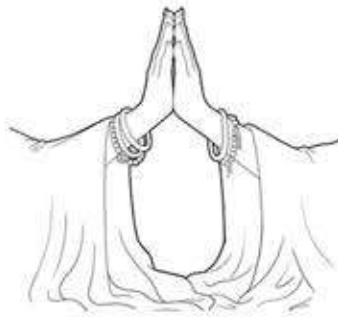
Now I see that I will need an extra ear  
to be attuned to my heart,  
for she also has her song:  
sometimes a boom-ticka-clank of disquiet,  
a squeezing squeak of dread,  
sometimes a moaning dirge of sorrow,  
a sigh of weary discouragement.  
Let me place a hand on my heart  
to comfort, to assure: "I hear you. I am listening."  
For then a warmth steals in beneath that hand,  
the constriction eases, and the hearing  
of my other ears suddenly clears, like a radio  
finding the perfect landing on a dial.

So now let me be content  
with just these and no more:  
a hand,  
a heart,  
and a trio of ears.

# I Want to Live Like an Ear Celeste Boudreaux

*continued*

Write your own poem starting with: "I want to start living like a [blank]."  
Could be anything: an object, an animal or other natural creature, a  
kind of person, whatever. What makes you want to live differently?



# Will You Wear An Earring Lynn White

---

Will you wear an earring  
for me  
clasp it to your flesh  
never mind the bruise  
never mind the pain.  
Will you wear this earring  
and give me a lip-sticky kiss.

Will you wear my earring  
make a little hole  
in your skin  
in your ear  
pierce it  
then  
carefully thread it through  
and give me a lip-sticky kiss  
then let me see  
the writings  
and pictures  
on your skin.

Will you wear this earring  
or will you keep you keep your skin  
pristine  
clear as a baby's  
unpierced  
unbruised  
unblemished  
aged like fine wine  
naturally.

# Will You Wear An Earring Lynn White

*continued*

I wrote the poem musing about all the people of all ages, shapes and genders who favour multiple piercings and tattoos in UK (but not so much in southern Europe). I was pondering changing ideas make-up and beauty over time and linking this to relationships and changes there. What does this poem stir in you?



# What It's All About Belle Schmidt

We love, we argue, sometimes in anger, but  
always grateful for the art of

communication. It's all about  
expression, making ourselves clear

and understood, but also  
taking time to meditate,

to be mindful, and to express  
thankfulness. I listen to you,

you listen to me. We open each day  
with a new sun, a new smile and

loving laughter, healing laughter.  
I'm still me, you are you: We celebrate

uniqueness. No need for champagne.  
Stop the rush of work, brush schedules

aside, put the world's agenda on hold.  
be bold, follow your own road,

or build a road, if there isn't one.



Brown-eyed Susans bend  
along roadside ditch for miles  
we pass — no notice

There's Always Tomorrow.



We fell in love and  
In my heart, I dug a small hole and  
Planted an acorn for you.

In your heart,  
You ploughed a whole field and  
Planted spinach.

And over the years  
I watered my sapling and it grew  
Into a towering, robust Oak.  
And you continued to reap and plant spinach.  
And I do love spinach.

But you grew tired,  
Perhaps from the hard work of tending your field,  
Or perhaps you did not like the shade my Oak cast.  
Perhaps you wanted someone  
Who could trade with you:  
Carrots for spinach  
Or some such similar crop.

So you bulldozed my Oak.  
You toppled it.  
And when it fell,  
It splintered beyond repair;  
Its great roots upended, stand exposed.

This cannot be undone.  
You cannot right the Oak.  
It will never grow again.  
We will never enjoy its noble splendour, its generous shade.

*Continued on the next page*



*continued*

But you can move ahead unaffected,  
Because what you planted was shallow,  
Labour-intensive,  
But easily reproduced.

I grieve my Oak.



Like many women my age, I found myself the unwitting recipient of a divorce at age 50 after 25 years of marriage. To say it turned my world upside down, is an understatement. Poetry, especially that of Mary Oliver, John O'Donahue and many others along the way, has helped me to process, to survive and to heal. This poem is a reflection on why this experience was so earth-shattering for me and yet the other person seemed to walk away with barely a backward glance. It explores whether love is transactional or unconditionally giving.

Gardens and nature are always rich metaphors for our life experiences. How would you express your experience or expectations of your relationships?

# How Much I Would Have Loved You May Garner

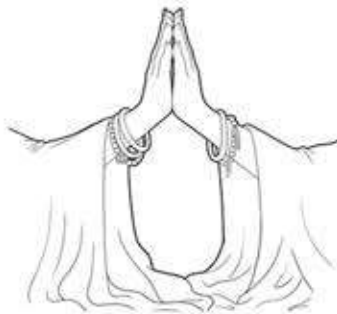
You have no idea how much I would have loved you.

How much I would have loved you so much sooner if you would have found me at a different time, under different circumstances. Then, perhaps I wouldn't have wound up in a different set of arms first, the same ones that strangled the heart out of me, ripping it into pulp, washing it in acid, before replacing it.

How much I would have loved you if you stumbled across me before I changed, before I turned into the creature I despise. Maybe you would have caught me in time, reminding me I did not need to change, to morph, to shape shift into flesh that didn't belong to me.

How much I would have loved you in the darkest days of my youth, knowing I wasn't alone, that there was someone else who understood completely, utterly, fully.

Perhaps then, I wouldn't have felt so alone after all.



# I Didn't Know I Was Ready Peter Reed

---

She blew out the candle...  
and left me in the dark...

to ponder the immensity of love in my heart

That's what grieving can do  
that's what mourning can bring...

And with the stars, as before  
I used to feel so at home

Now a reminder of being so alone

The cold distance between them  
Between her soul and mine

The resounding silence among them  
echoing her never answering back

With all that now sits in the dark,  
to feel and allow what has broken us apart...

She blew out the candle,  
I didn't know I was ready.

## She Left Like A Season

---

She left like a season  
of summer turning to fall....  
These warm spring breezes  
like she never left at all...

# I Didn't Know I Was Ready Peter Reed

*continued*

The heart knows no time and sometimes may never feel ready for what opens our way.

And what is revealed, connects us to what was inevitable...  
to the immensity of what the heart can hold,  
and to what may be necessary for our soul's evolution.

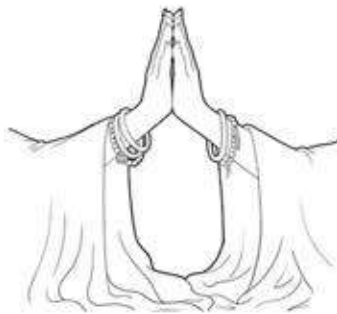
I invite one to feel what arises inside when we are least expecting,  
to stay present... with how it moves in the body, without words,  
without a story, without commentary.

Just listen, move, cry, laugh, and let it be.

There is release and freedom in any pure feeling or emotion.

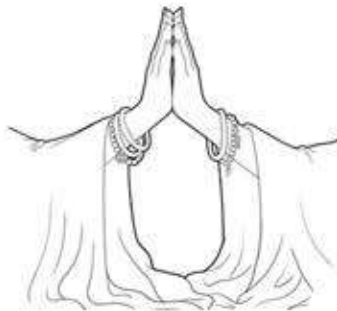
Then if words come, they may form something beautiful... a line, a poem,  
a story, a chapter.

Writing in and of itself can tell us what we need to know and be healing  
for us.



# Landscape of My Heart Bethany Taulbee

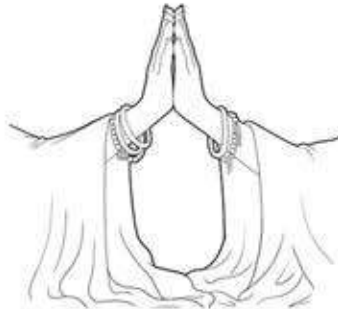
The landscape of my heart has changed  
The arrangement of my former self  
ReArrAnGeD  
My river of resentment has started to run *dry*  
The warmth of my inner sun no longer passes me by  
The cold winds of the past begin to turn to a present *breeze*  
My soul takes a stroll down memory lane  
Without F-a-l-l-ing to my knees  
A *RAIN* of forgiveness brought life to my parched heart  
A RE-C-O-N-N-E-C-T-I-O-N to self  
A brand NEW start!  
A LETTING-GO storm HIT my complacent sea  
STIRRing up the waters of my bitterness to be revealed to me  
My hardened stone self, cracked O-P-E-N as *deeply* I felt  
Compassion *flooded* my being, as I allowed my anger to *melt*  
The landscape of my heart has changed  
My LOVE grown W-I-D-E as a mountain range  
My ocean of capacity found a way to dive *deep*  
Reconnection is a divine gift  
I'll gratefully keep



And now I ask you, how has your journey changed the landscape of your heart?

# You Will Know Rebecca Surmont

You will know when  
you have given  
    and taken  
have loved  
    and lost  
have won  
    and burned  
have fought  
    and fainted  
When you have wailed until  
    ribs hurt and the  
    heart aches to smile,  
that there is an interior ocean  
and the shores are merely illusion.



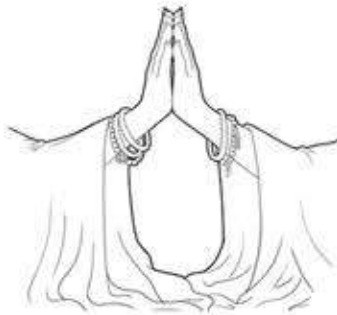
Intentions can be a powerful drive that brings one to action, and it is important to keep that drive despite what external evidence may show us about the ranges of human behavior. Humans are not rational, in love or other emotions, but an intention can keep one centered on a premise out of which to take action. Therefore, it is vital we remain clear on our intentions, especially to love.

When have you held an intention to love and were met with an even greater opportunity?

# True Intimacy Lori Zavada

---

is a flash point that triggers a sit-down—  
a kitchen-floor conversation with a friend  
that lasts well beyond midnight.  
Every word passing between you  
is an emotional disrobing of fear and regret,  
and the protective armor you are wearing  
to survive this life, loosens and falls away.  
No clothes come off,  
but you've never been more naked  
with another human being in your life,  
and the taking turns of listening  
and being heard goes on forever,  
stirring a universe inside you.



Think back to a time when you felt truly heard by someone. Consider how you also heard them. Write about the circumstances surrounding that warm exchange starting with, Taking turns to listen...

# Passion Has No Currency Linda Mundell

He sits back in the lawn chair of woven plastic fibers  
as the roses in the garden shares their familiar sweet scent with the air  
around him.

His eye lids close slightly as he draws in a deeper breath to examine the  
texture and flavor of his morning among the roses.

Slowly his eyes open alertly scanning each bunch, each bud relishing  
the petals, colors, and shapes.

He smiles slightly thinking to himself.

This garden is my passion.

She walks purposefully through the gate; her breath is sharp with anticipation.  
It's a long walk, she has little time, they are waiting for her.

She arrives at the fence.

The apes, with their brown and tan faces, all smiles and giggles, showing  
their teeth and gums.

They bounce and jump in happy dances to see her and to hear the sound  
of the metal retaining gate open.

Breakfast is served!

Bunches of greens, bananas, and apples. She smiles and feels her heart warm.

These apes are my passion

She wakes early, thoughts swirling in her head.

The quiet solitude of night, with its busy dream-visions beckon her to awaken.

She comes to her desk in the corner of the still darkened room.

There she writes her daily words.

The relentless chatter in her minds yearns to be put on the page.

She relaxes her body into the chair and the familiar sensation of comfort  
and relief washes through her as she writes her morning rituals in the calm  
amber glow of almost daylight.

It is a soft and sweet feeling that grows inside her chest.

She pauses her pen, for just a moment on the paper, then she begins.

Writing is my passion.

*Continued on next page*



# Passion Has No Currency Linda Mundell

*continued*

Need I go on or do you see?

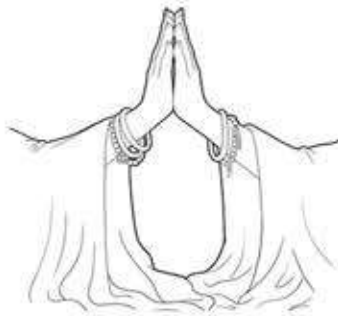
To each their own is the way it must be. No grand overture to be found or made.

Passion's unique in every way.

Passion has not a set in stone, it comes from deep within the soul.

This is where it's built and owned.

Passion has no currency



This poem is part of a new series of poetry, soon to be released by Grace of the Sea. It is inspired by two very dear people. The first, my husband Bob of 50+ years, the other a close and best friend from high school; she's now a volunteer for Save the Chimps in Fort Pierce, Florida.

# Advice From A Mailbox Becky Ventura

Discover daily things that you don't know  
News delivered in a shroud of blue  
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Red flag up; in your letters go  
Ask for what you want, don't make do  
Discover daily things that you don't know.

Routine is simply part of our life's flow  
Listen to the wind, it speaks to you  
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Birds chatter from afar, a jay or crow  
Take a wide stance, get a bigger view  
Discover daily things that you don't know.

You can practice patience, but please know  
There's good trouble disobeying rules  
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Poets say bliss co-exists with woe  
Dance with beauty now surrounding you  
Discover daily things that you don't know  
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.



Write a poem about an everyday activity using villanelle form, or using some form of repetition. Elevate the ordinary activity, connecting it to spirit.

When have you held an intention to love and were met with an even greater opportunity?



I love you pistachio ice-cream  
the way you taste on a hot day—  
even if pistachio is hard to spell  
and I never actually devoured a cup

or a cone or if I did  
it was the chocolate sprinkles I was after  
when I walked into the parlor  
two chalk boards

listing so many flavors.  
I chose you my nutty dessert  
or thought of a bowl of you,  
not cold, but roasted and salty

splitting my nails as I cracked you open  
and that's the cold truth about love,  
something opens, something breaks  
yet there was a time

I wouldn't touch you  
let alone lick as you melted  
down green as a sapling's  
spring buds or dished

like the fluffed-up wings  
of a dancing swan pair  
my pistachio, my dervish.  
What could be sweeter?



How and where does love speak to you. Does it call you by your name?  
What simple actions or objects draw you to love?



Love the golden starfruit,  
the overripe, the bruised  
and fallen, the pigs that  
plunder leavings, uproot  
everything you've planted.

Love the well- half-filled,  
eager for any gift of rain  
and the sugar beets whose  
leaves praise sun yet hide  
their heads, shy of discovery.

Love the promises like seeds  
lying dormant in frozen soil,  
some wild and crazy, others  
obscure, not knowing which  
will wither, which will bloom.

Love the uncertainty,  
the hollow place, despair,  
the days of too much sleep  
without dreams, the full  
moon calling us to waken.

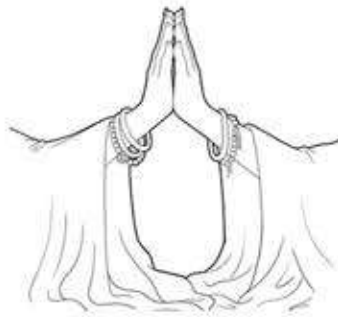
Love the tears of empathy,  
dark shadow days when doubt  
stalks grieving pewter clouds,  
days of purification, death-  
days you'd rather not recall.

Love what you wish to bring  
closer, the beauty of a moon-  
flower, heart of firefly, a kindness  
of ravens, the transparency  
of glasswing moths.



*continued*

Open your heart and reflect on how you love the world when judgement has vanished.



# The Reminders



Karen Hoffman

Inspired by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's *The Question*

I have a bracelet  
inscribed with the quote:  
*Is this the path of love?*

I have a tattoo -  
a sun rising,  
a field of flowers,  
a trail running through.  
Flesh inscribed with the quote:  
*Is this the path of love?*

*Excessive*, you may think.  
*Indulgent?* NO.

I need the reminders,  
I need to ask,  
I need to check  
over and over,  
again and again.

Because.  
Yes.  
I do forget.

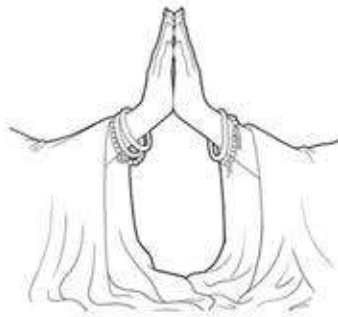


It's hard to navigate through life on a daily basis with an intention of love. We are all embroiled one way or another based on our current times. LOVE escapes me at times; other times, it is easier than breathing. As a completely fallible human being, this poem shows the measures I've taken to remind myself that LOVE is really the way to go. What steps have you taken to stay on the path? Do you forget, as I do, or do you feel like you're making it happen every day? Think about how you show up daily, and whether you, too, have to be reminded. Write whatever you feel in the moment.

THE REMINDERS by Karen Hoffman.  
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# There Is No Path Jo-Anne Rowley

There is no path  
for love to disappear.  
Love lives on in song  
and psalm and serenade  
and in each morning sunrise.  
Love lives long  
in every living beating heart.  
Love lives in you.



Recently I had pneumonia and laid in bed all day, restless and weak. Babe, my sweet companion, an 80lb. muscular Pit Bull rescue, laid alongside me 24/7, guarding, protecting and occasionally licking my hand. I felt safe. I felt loved, and knew I would recover. Seems love can rise from any seed in the Universe, human or otherwise.

Write about a time when love appeared when most needed, though from an unexpected or unusual source.

# The Business of Love Amy Segerstrom

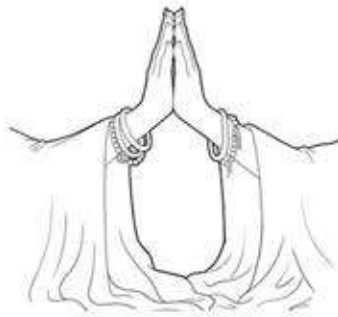
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We are here on earth  
To love  
To spin love, stretch love, spread love  
When our fingertips grow callused  
May it be the work of love  
When our bones ache and our hearts break  
May it be from the rough and tumble play of love  
When our gut laughs and brain farts  
May it be from the pressure of love  
When we are called to choose  
May we pick love  
When we feast  
May it be a banquet of love  
When we swim  
May it be in an ocean of love  
When we thunder, storm, and shake  
May the earth quake  
With love  
When we question  
May the answer always be love  
When we make love  
May it be love on the mountaintop love  
When we birth  
May the babes with whom we are blessed  
Embody love  
When we die  
May our last gasp of breath  
Breathe love  
When we begin again  
Love, love, love  
Forever  
No end to time  
No end to love  
Love

# The Business of Love Amy Segerstrom

*continued*

“In the poem “The Seed Cracked Open,” Sufi poet, Hafiz, asks the question “What love mischief can we do for the world today?” I love the playful spin love acquires with this question. It’s a bit edgy but in a good way. I hope my poem inspires you to reflect on your own “love mischief” on behalf of the world today.



# The Courage to Touch Darlene Dunn

---

The active ingredient in our hands is Touch

Touch to release feelings.  
Touch to move forward.

Touch to soothe.  
Touch to heal.  
Touch to release.  
Touch to connect  
in ways words cannot

Touch is the beginning of movement  
toward someone  
toward something

Touch decides  
what to hold,  
what to keep close

Touch allows all things  
to move toward completeness.

And yet—

Fear blocks Touch

Notice the next time  
you want to touch something unknown,  
something separated from you.

Notice how fear rises  
and stops your movement—  
how it asks you to pull back.

*Continued on the next page*

# The Courage to Touch Darlene Dunn

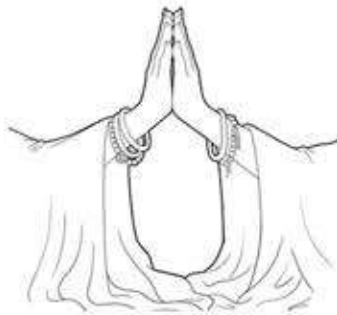
*continued*

But breathe.

Touch through the fear.  
Touch through the pause

For touch is the moment  
that begins the movement—  
activating the essential ingredient  
of our hands:

Touch.





I still ask for friends and family  
to be held in the light, for  
our sacred source  
to walk arm and arm  
with them so they know  
they are not alone  
when their paths get hard.

I still ask for guidance,  
to be shown the best way forward  
for all concerned.

I still ask for protection  
for the plants and trees,  
birds, and other animals  
with which we share the land,  
for fires to quench, tsunamis to calm,  
earthquakes and volcanoes  
to vent on empty spaces.

I still ask my heart to focus  
on the seeds of good  
sprouting within each person.

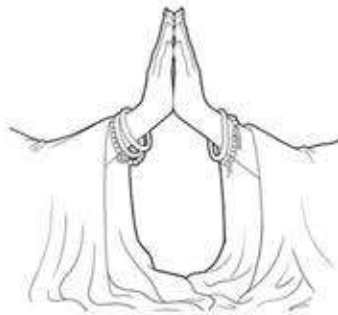
I still ask for peace to reign  
among the peoples of this planet.

But mostly, I tend to pause  
wherever I am,  
whatever I am doing,  
and as my lungs fill  
with the amazement of air,  
I look around in gratitude  
and simply whisper, thank you.



*continued*

When you are worried or fearful, do you ask for help?



Pretend you have a magic ball and write about what you would ask or give gratitude for.

# Railway Carriages: the heart connection Mary Ray Goehring

*After Railway Carriages by Vincent van Gogh 1888*  
For J.R. Goehring

At 3, if he was a good boy, we drove  
to the switching station in Batavia  
where there usually stood several trains,  
some moving. We called it the six track and  
watched, from the car,  
along the side of the road.

When we needed to cross railroad tracks  
during our ordinary journeys  
to school, doctors, groceries,  
it was extra excitement when  
the signal lights flashed  
and the red and white gates went down.  
We'd listen for the engine's long low  
doppler voice coming and going. Listen  
for the exact moment it was here  
right in front of us.

Now he's 41, a working man,  
we see each other when we can. But  
I still think of him whenever I see a train.  
Still listen  
for the exact moment that voice,  
his voice,  
is here with me.

# Railway Carriages: the heart connection Mary Ray Goehring

*continued*

A train crossing our busy lives can be annoying. We have to wait for it to pass, one car after another. But in this poem, my son's enjoyment at seeing the train made me change my attitude. Who or what has helped you find enjoyment with a normally mundane thing?



Because, like on a train, we are constantly rushing forward never stopping long enough to pay attention to what is right in front of us, what makes you stop and enjoy what is right in front of you?

# At My Mom and Dad's House Paula Gordon Lepp

When the sun sets in the heart of the Mississippi Delta you can watch the descent, notice how shadows dapple the stubbled cotton fields, turning and elongating each passing minute, watch the sun hang in the trees lining the horizon, gilding whatever clouds happen to be passing by, then quickly drop until the last slender crescent of light is swallowed by the earth.

We took our 18 month old out to see the sunset. When I put her down, she began tottling across the field toward the sun, crying, opening and closing her little hands, trying to scoop up the fading light. We did not expect this reaction, this gulping, breathless crying, this hiccuping heartbreak.

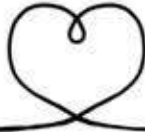
I picked her up, placing her soft belly against my chest, ran my thumbs under her eyes to wipe away small jewels of tears, then I turned us both to face the opposite way where a waxing gibbous moon was rising on its own horizon, climbing up through the tree tops until it popped free, its silver light bathing us all.

I felt my daughter relax into wonder. "Nu-nu", she sighed, then reached out for the light. Nu-nu. Moon. Bright new word. For the rest of our visit, every evening we went outside to watch sunset then moonrise, three generations standing together under a sky turning gold as treasure, red as love, and, as the night grew darker, witnessing what all is bathed in brilliance when seen and given the chance.



Think about a time you were with family or friends, doing an ordinary activity, when you were suddenly filled with an overwhelming sense of love. Use multiple senses to describe this moment. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel? Did this experience change how you meet the ordinary?

Allow



Rachel Burdick Vinkey

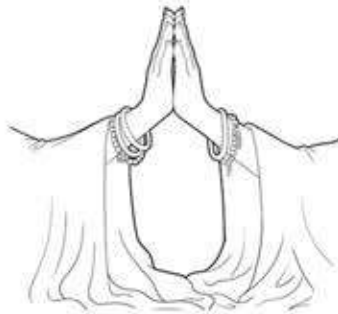
Allow  
the poet  
in the mother

allow  
the mother  
in the poet

ache  
and  
push  
and  
pull

Words as quilts  
words are flesh

This moment  
its slanting  
its love



Consider ways that you offer the deepest part of yourself. Meditate on the beauty and difficulty of that. Try to write from there...

# Over Decades... Suzanne S. Austin-Hill

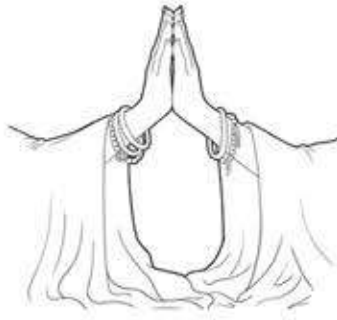
---

the future  
would be shaped by her advice -  
unsought, unwanted  
dismissed, disparaged

yet

these important words,  
resounded, rebounded  
permeated, demonstrated

fervently and faithfully  
a mother's love



Be sure to savor every moment of angels' labor in straining hymns while  
their wings whisper the enormity of His love.

Write a quatrain where all the words in the first line begin with L, in the  
second line O, in the third line V, and in last line, E.

(BONUS – ABAB rhyme scheme)

# Sacred James Crews

---

When I say the word sacred,  
I mean the dry, chapped skin  
of my mother's hand that I held  
as often as I could the last week  
she was alive. I mean her smile  
as soon as she saw me walking,  
masked, into her hospital room  
and said the two words that will  
follow me to my own final days:  
My baby. I mean the chills that  
gather at the back of my neck  
when I say those words out loud,  
and feel the love interlaced with  
each letter, each sound, her voice  
filled with childlike delight  
at seeing her own child again.



# Sacred James Crews

*continued*

I remember moving in a perpetual state of both anticipatory grief and amazement during the final days of my mother's life. I spent a week with her, showing up early each morning at the hospital and staying by her bedside for as long as I could. We told stories, watched a marathon of Hallmark Christmas movies together, and I fed her whenever her hand shook too much to bring the fork or spoon to her mouth. I did not know she was dying at the time, though the signs might be clear now in hindsight. I only sensed that what we were sharing was sacred, no matter how hard or sad those days also felt. I will never forget the comfort flowing both ways between us as I held her hand, feeling the dryness and rubbing in lotion a few times. I'll also never forget the words she uttered the first morning I stepped into her room, having flown in the night before. "My baby," she said, smiling, having recognized me in spite of the mask I wore. It was impossible for me not to feel the larger presence of something holy, something awesome—in the truest sense of that word—that I might venture to call God. Others may prefer another term, and though my own spiritual practice is a mix of meditation, prayer, writing, walks in nature, and wisdom drawn from all traditions, I find I also crave a name for that transcendent feeling that followed me through those days. As Mirabai Starr writes in *Ordinary Mysticism*, "God is our code word for everything that is wondrous and mysterious and hidden at the heart of our deepest heartache and most childlike delight." I find the same feeling when I can drop into any present moment with loving attention seamlessly woven with whatever or whomever is before me. And when I hear again those two words my mother said to me—My baby—spoken with childlike wonder at seeing her own child, I know I will carry them with me for the rest of my life.



When you hear the word, "sacred," what images or memories stir for you? You might borrow my first line to spark some writing of your own: "When I say the word sacred . . ." See what specific details spring to mind, and allow yourself to be surprised.

# Merci. My Mother Was An Angel Linda Ohlson Graham

My mother was an angel  
With wings of grace and beauty ...  
Tolerance and strength  
Gentleness and kindness  
Wisdom and humor  
'Care packages for years'  
were some of her attributes.  
She allowed me to be my own person ...  
and didn't judge me ...  
'I've taught you the difference between right and wrong ...  
you have to make your own decisions.'  
gave me freedom I took advantage of.  
When I reflect  
on dynamics  
of someone  
who  
supported me  
loved me  
gave me **GREATEST** joy ...  
laughed with so hard I had to pull the car off the road ...

Even encouraged me to travel with a gentle man  
who was Wild and Crazy  
who I then sailed  
thousands of miles with ...

I breathe  
with **DEEPEST**  
gratitude.



Reflect upon your relationship with your mother - and compose a poem.

# Coming Home After 1945 Swann

---

I don't know  
what may have been encased  
in his memory, his body, his brain

I don't know  
if he came back  
with more inside of him  
than what was taken  
from his body, his psyche

I don't know  
what sounds reverberated  
through his body, his mind  
what sharp fragments of horror  
kept on shredding the life in him  
and blossomed into  
that fire of pain and anger  
the smoke in his aura  
clouds of despair, worry, desperation of  
unknown proportions leaping  
from day to night to day  
without sunrise on the horizon

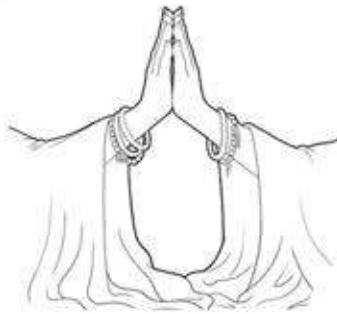
I don't know  
which of his wartime actions  
had rooted in his being  
his youth and innocence  
taken hostage forever  
in a dark submarine in deep water

*Continued on next page*

# Coming Home After 1945 Swann

*continued*

but I know  
his sensitive being  
lived in a slender body  
neither made for war  
whatever damage came about in my life  
I now have compassion for him  
a tender love  
I have forgiven  
because the deep inner intention for his life  
was love, always love



What does this poem trigger in you?

Write down some words that stand out, name the uppermost emotion in yourself, maybe you remember a situation:

Did someone come home to you burdened by the past, by a recent event in life, with PTSD? What did you experience in the encounter?

Possible first lines:

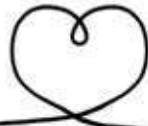
When I saw her/him first...

When s/he came in/back/home, my heart...

After her/his...life became...

Focus on yourself, how did you react/respond. What happened to the emotion in you that you wrote down? What was the development, the progression of your feeling, the relationship in the situation?

Take some of the ideas and let your writing explore what is happening in you.



I must have cried out in the night,  
Disturbed by some bad dream  
And coming into consciousness,  
Saw my father sitting beside my bed

He didn't speak, just sat there,  
And I could see the burning ember  
From his lit cigarette — the smoke from it,  
Which I usually waved away in disgust,

Was sweet incense to me in that moment  
Small girl in a big bed — I closed my eyes  
And drifted back to sleep, comforted  
By his quiet presence beside me



---

Over the years, my relationship with my father was complicated, but when I was a little girl I adored him. This is one of my treasured memories of how he took care of me.

Think of someone close to you with whom you've had a complicated relationship. If you can, think of an incident or encounter with that person that gave you comfort when you needed it most.

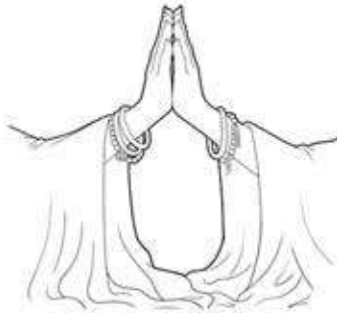
# An Unspoken Compass Grace Marie Chapman

The wonders of my mind  
A glimpse into the fluttering eye  
Moments captured in time  
Inspiration becoming clear  
The untold stories are near  
Memories start to unravel  
And happiness triumphs above  
A burning candle in my sight  
A shining moon above me every night  
Whispers of love in the wind  
Brushing by as painful memories begin to rescind  
He is always by my side  
Smiling down with immense pride  
Bound in grace, my next chapter begins to take place.



# Valentine's Day Therese L Broderick

Sorting through a stiff old binder  
I find a love letter, four paragraphs of  
my father's cursive, steadfast as the nun  
who taught him upper and lower case,  
how any pencil guided by an earnest hand  
might genuflect to a ghostly blue line.  
He was dying that February at the end  
of a century, on oxygen, but remembered  
to put in writing her "blitheful spirit,  
undaunted courage, inordinate kindness,  
unfailing wisdom." And she, rest in peace,  
preserved his gift softly creased, so that I  
might someday discover the sorrows  
of their devotion, searching documents for  
something else entirely, long expired.



What facts or secrets did you discover about your parent(s) after their death(s)? About ways they cared for each other or for you?

What are the necessary sorrows of loving devotion?

Look through your files of family documents, photo albums, or scrapbooks. Write about any item that grabs your attention.

# My Future Dust Makes Plans Laura Tate

*In response to the poem, "Thank You," by Ross Gay*

When you say  
All you love will turn to dust  
I have no argument.  
My father's dust has settled inside a black box  
on a shelf at my sister's house.  
Now his dust stands watch over faces inside metal frames.  
Within my dreams live all the dead I have loved.  
They wear bright colors, like that red shirt  
my father wore in the photo of him laughing  
one lemonade summer afternoon.  
The other people in that photo are also dead.  
Now they give advice,  
like my father reminding me to check tire pressure  
and fill up my gas tank before a long trip.  
My future dust is making plans.  
It wants to wear bright colors  
inside someone's dream, to give advice  
and share opinions, like the best way  
to chop an onion, how to thread a needle  
or mend the heel of a sock,  
when to speak and when to say no words.  
My dust will hold a sign that says  
We All Turn to Dust Someday.  
It will carry stupid jokes  
and chocolate covered almonds  
inside pants pockets,  
along with coins for restless hands.  
Yes, everyone we love will turn to dust,  
but let it happen gently, like the whisper  
that has yet to leave your lips.  
Let the dust of everything  
be soft  
beneath tender feet.

# My Future Dust Makes Plans Laura Tate

I've thought a lot about how it is possible to stay connected to loved ones after they've left this world. My father often appears in my dreams and I am grateful that when this happens, he looks healthy and happy. (His final years with Alzheimers were brutal unfortunately.) The photo described in my poem is imprinted in my brain: my father, wearing a bright red cotton shirt, sits at a large table chatting with his cousin and his cousin's wife, both who were dear to me, and who also show up in my dreams. There's a pitcher of lemonade and a loaf homemade bread on top of a white tablecloth. They were happily chatting and laughing on a warm summer afternoon. I'd like to think they whisper encouraging words from wherever they are, and that when I'm gone, my children and grandchildren will still feel my love.



Who shows up inside your dreams? What do you think they want to tell you? How does the love keep flowing even after we leave this earth?

# When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

---

When my warm flesh

transmutes to ashes  
and I'm scattered—  
half in New Hampshire forest  
in thanks for the pine-needed floor,  
half in Cape Cod waters  
to enrich the mollusks mud flats—  
please gather these things:

my journals,  
on the first shelf  
under the window in the study—  
the ones I don't want read.

From the upper drawer  
in our shared bureau,  
take the opossum earrings  
you gave me the second spring  
I spent swooning over  
their nocturnal visits to our deck.

Grab a lip balm—  
the honey kind I was addicted to,  
told you to apply hourly  
If I were ever in a coma  
or lost use of my hands.

Find the driftwood  
with the heart-shaped middle  
not officially for sale, yet gifted  
to me by a woman at a craft fair  
because I was the first to notice it.

*Continued on next page*

# When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

*continued*

Bury these things somewhere beautiful  
we never got to see together,  
maybe where water and land kiss,  
or in the armpit of a wild rock formation  
in the Utah desert you loved  
and said I would gush poetry over  
when we finally made it there one day.

One day didn't come.  
It never does,  
and we couldn't admit  
our bucket lists, too long,  
would be half full  
when we died.

Oh, Love,  
the fruit of our sweet life  
rounded my belly in my dusk years.  
Take great care with our daughter,  
and know I was sated,

that even the grueling days  
held verse—  
stanzas so ripe  
I was often drunk on them.

# When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

*continued*

When I consider my eventual demise, I mostly think of what I want to leave behind. I like to imagine warm memories of big love and small kindnesses, snippets of compassionate conversation that live on in the hearts of those I have touched. I also envision (perhaps aspirationally) armloads of art and poetry, offered freely to the wind without regard to how and where they land.

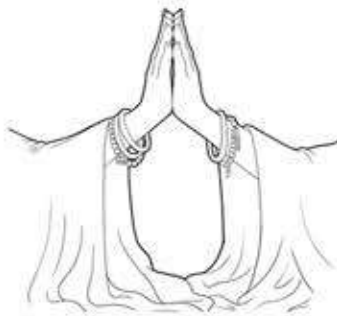


What bits of yourself would you like to leave behind when you go? How are your days reflecting that, and/or how are you perhaps hiding your light from others?

# Legacy Judy Bousquin

---

Legacy of love  
nourishing and nurturing  
feeds generations.



What is your legacy of love that nourishes and nurtures those you hold dear?

How do you envision your love legacy being received by those in generations to come?

# Prayers of Love by the Hours (Haiku) PattiJoy Posan

Night  
darkness without fear  
holds the world like a secret  
the unseen draws near

Dawn  
Light filters through curtain  
Comforter begs me to stay  
Mystery wakes me

Mid Morning  
Coffee soothes  
Peanuts spread on banana  
Guiding what unfolds

Noon  
Dishes wait in sink  
Warm water blesses my hands  
Light shines with a bow

Late Afternoon  
Pots on stove bubbling  
Sacred meal of beans and rice  
Spirit leans closer

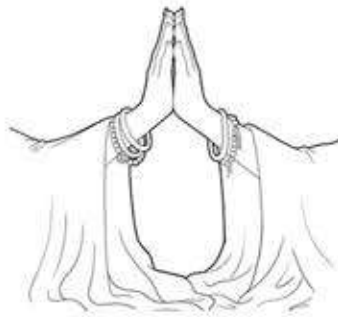
Evening  
Twilight quiet breath  
Heart is open to memories  
Deep, Old, and Holy

Night  
Darkness without fear  
Secrets in our dreams  
The unseen is near

# Prayers of Love by the Hours (Haiku) PattiJoy Posan

*continued*

Sadhguru wrote, "A mind at rest is the temple of creation."  
The Prayers of Love were written as they came to me as I followed the hours of the day.  
As these Haiku's flowed through me I felt the intention of devotion and gentleness - while holding the warmth of love.



I love Rumi. I have above my typewriter "Let yourself become living poetry".

"I have been a seeker and I still am, but stopped asking books and the stars. I started listening to the teaching of my soul." Rumi

How might this quote by Rumi speak to The Intention of Love?



I could not hear the blood  
entering my vein  
one drop at a time all night long.

Four pints. Four donors.  
Four faces I would never see.  
Hands I would never touch.

I could not hear their voices—  
the languages they spoke,  
the prayers they prayed.

I did not know what car they drove,  
or who they voted for or why.  
But I knew I would die without them.

I knew the rupture in my body  
would only be healed  
because four strangers said yes.

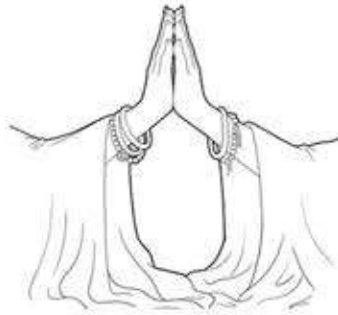
And now, I cannot look  
at the woman in the grocery store,  
or the man who cut me off in traffic,

or the people in line at the voting booth,  
without wondering,  
Did you save my life?

# Fused Gloria Heffernan

*continued*

What does it mean to be connected to others? Recall or imagine a time when you experienced a moment of connection with a stranger or a person with whom you have some fundamental differences. How can we be present to each other's humanity despite our differences? Write a poem or journal entry in which you imagine yourself "fused" within a community of mutual dependence and trust. How might this viewpoint effect your interactions with people you might not usually engage? It may seem out of reach in these times of polarization and injustice, but perhaps that makes the need all the more pressing.



# The Love That Never Dies C.L. McReynolds

---

Watching your chest rise and fall,  
Waiting and counting the seconds between each breath.  
Waiting for the eventual, inevitable cease.  
You sleep and perchance even to dream,  
As we wait for the final sleep to overtake you.

We wait...

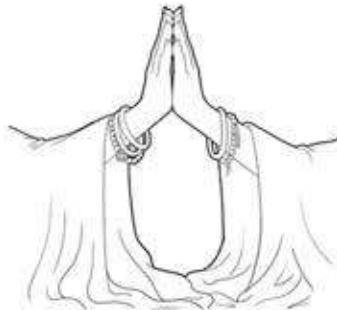
Between cups of coffee, between kisses,  
Between shared memories and tears.  
Snatches of time to steal a shower or a smoke,  
A plate of sausages and eggs cooked by a loving brother,  
The pulsing beat of the oxygen machine in the next room.  
Conversation filters in and out. Even occasional laughter.  
Eggs in a basket. Anticipation and appreciation.  
The love of a family that never fades.  
The gift of being surrounded by those you love when your time to  
travel comes at last.


# The Love That Never Dies C.L. McReynolds

---

*continued*

"During the darkest moments, there is a light to be found in togetherness and community. Solidarity within the solemnity. Grace within the grief. It lies in half drunk mugs of coffee and pieces of cobbler delivered by a kind and loving hand. Find yours and let your light shine."



All We Love  Lynn Kincanon

---

In Colorado one season does not ease into the next.  
Summer does not follow Spring  
but brutally pushes it out of the way  
leaving spring blooms spent too soon.  
Neither does it cede to autumn until too late  
to wear my cute woolen sweaters  
and press all the vibrant leaves into my book of life.

Winter does not care one hoot for autumn  
often arriving too early like an anxious suitor  
and leaving abruptly like a cad  
after already taking advantage, spoiling everything.  
And just when you thought it was over  
it arrives back like a bull, and dumps a load of snow  
a top your tulips and daffodils so longingly awaited.  
Yet, how often winter is a bust here!  
Leaving scant snow in its wake, disappointing  
all who love the season for its crystalline beauty.

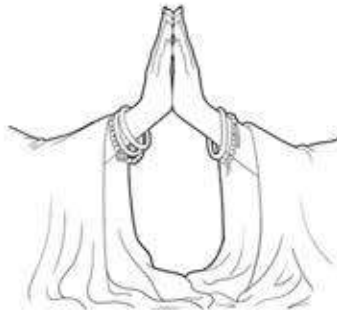
Colorado is a coyote. Climate change a fear  
all we love will soon be flint,  
all we came here for, ravaged by the sands.  
These tumultuous winds bringing swift alternations  
to an already beleaguered landscape.  
Seasons like this one, 2026, will herald  
one unfamiliar world after another.  
Snow globes will be the thing  
we remember winter by.

Now, each snowy day a celebration.  
Each crocus a precious jewel.

# All We Love Lynn Kincanon

*continued*

Each year that follows, the climate change only gets more drastic. The earth is crying out to save it and we don't listen, we don't hear. Can you take a line of this poem as your poem's epigraph and begin your own chant for the earth's survival, honor something you love that you know will be lost in the years ahead. Use 5 of the words in this poem that attract you for your own.



Don't give up so easily  
now that your prayers and recitations haven't  
miraculously changed the whole of your life.  
A single drop of water daily crashing against  
the same surface eventually smoothes the hard  
edges of rock, and in due time, impresses a  
divot, something that can hold the gathering  
rain. Keep practicing, wherever you may be,  
no matter the conditions. Keep whispering  
your hand to your heart—  
*may I be happy / may I be healthy / may I be safe  
from harm.*

And then  
*may you be happy / may you be healthy / may you  
be safe from harm.*

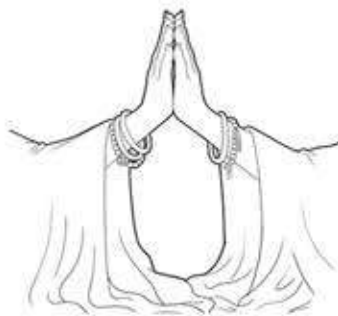
And after that the chorus of the sum of us  
*may we be happy / may we be healthy / may we be  
safe from harm.*

Any prayer will do. For ease and peace. For  
comfort. For joy. For fortitude. Let this be a  
companion song. Soon what was rock becomes  
stone, and what was stone becomes resting spot.  
By then your whole life will have changed. And  
you, having grown accustomed to this steady  
tenderness, will have barely noticed how gently  
you've walked through your own door, arriving.

# Loving-Kindness Moudi Sbeity

*continued*

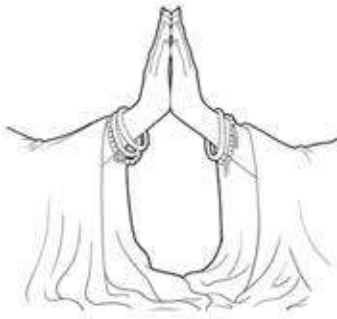
In a culture of urgency and instant manifestation, it becomes a radical act to set down the expectation of immediacy and instead step into steady commitment. This is how habits change after all, small steps taken every day. This is also how a flesh wound heals, in increment steps that slowly tend toward healing. So what of our hearts, our souls? Loving-kindness prayers may seem ineffective at first, but with persistent dedication they begin to show their mark on our hearts, smoothing the hardened places in us one prayer after another.



Reflect on your path. What is one small act you've done everyday that has brought you to where you stand now? Where do you see yourself in the future, and how might you get there? You may choose to begin with the prompt don't give up so easily. This could be a letter to your past self or an encouragement from your future self.

# Love's Attention Carol Frischman

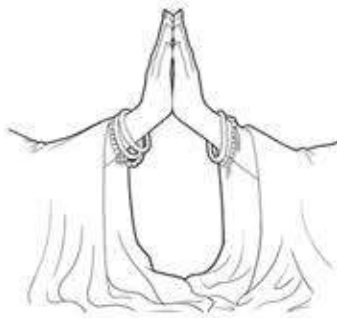
Sweet song from heart beats  
Listen sweet ones—me, love, us  
Guiding star lightens



Impromptu— this is my call (my haiku) out to you...now listen to your heart and respond however you choose to show up....

# Remembering Melissa Ireland

I can go nowhere  
or be no one,  
without the orchestra of the universe  
gracefully blooming melodies  
into that infinite space that I am.  
Seeing the stars  
and knowing they are part of  
the life in my DNA sends a magical tingling  
to my fingers and toes,  
and the colors of the rainbow decorate my spine,  
the clouds are my adventures,  
and the moon and I glow together  
in the night, hearing each other's dreams.  
Sometimes, raindrops, masquerading as tears,  
gather beneath my eyelids to greet the beauty of the day,  
and the wind breathes joy through my dancing limbs.  
And the artist in each of us, can be heard whispering,  
"we were made to be free in this infinite space".

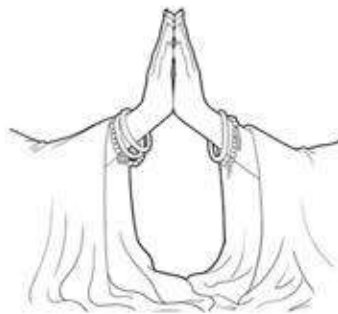




When this world  
Becomes a distant memory  
And the differences  
We thought defined us  
Drift away and disappear  
Like clouds in dazzling sunshine

When all our walls  
Gently crumble  
And vanish before our eyes  
When no barriers exist  
To keep us apart

When we see only  
The purest essence  
Of who we are  
Maybe then  
We can begin again  
In love



# Crow Spirit Joanne Snyder

---

Two crows flew in together and perched on the elm tree.  
Piercing glowing eyes looking at me  
I lovingly watched the crows intimacy and listened to their love notes.  
The clucks, clucks coo, coos .  
I had never realized they make more of a sound than the raucous caw, caw!  
Will this year bring more loving sounds than a raucous, violent caw?  
Will I speak more gently and lovingly to all of it including to myself!?



How does nature give you loving attention and inspiration?

# On Being Alone Julie Barton

---

*"Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving. When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape."*

~ Bell Hooks

It is possible I have forgotten  
how to truly be alone. I have  
been surrounded for so long that  
I am unsure how to be without  
another heart pumping  
in the same vicinity.

It is possible I have used others  
to escape while believing all along  
that I'd be fine, happy even, if  
everyone was gone. Turns out,  
when I am alone and try to sit,  
still and quiet, I freeze, ruminate,  
unsure what to do without someone  
asking for help or attention or love.  
Turns out I need to remember how to  
tend to myself. It is possible  
I need to remember how to love me.

# On Being Alone Julie Barton

*continued*

I wrote this poem two weeks into being an empty nester. My youngest daughter had just left for college across the country, and it's fair to say my heart was aching. Thing is, for years, I'd always thought, As soon as they leave, I'll have time to... you name it: write, rest, travel, etcetera. Turns out I missed them more than I wanted to do those other things, and it's not that easy adjusting from life with kids at home to life with an empty house. After 21 years of parenting two daughters, I realized that I'd forgotten how to truly be by myself, and it's still taking me a while to find my footing. This has been a year of just remembering to be patient with myself.



Write about something that you were so excited for—but it didn't turn out anything like you'd expected. Name the feeling in your body. Lean into the humility of your discovery. Let yourself be vulnerable.

# Say Your Life Phyllis Cole-Dai

*in honor of the Buddhist monks  
who walked for peace from Texas to Washington, DC*

Say your life is a poem  
this day a stanza  
this hour a line  
this moment a word

Say you choose  
to compose yourself  
upon paper  
the color of heaven  
where it meets the ground

Say your body is the pen  
your spirit the ink  
your breathing the space  
around the marks you make

Say your feet are the nib  
just passing through  
without pressing the point

Say the poem of you  
is peace  
written in ink  
the color of fire  
across the turning pages of the land

Say the poem is showing up  
never giving up  
the offering of flowers

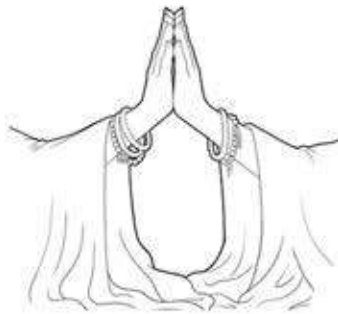
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# Say Your Life Phyllis Cole-Dai

*continued*

Say the poem of you  
walks thousands of miles  
millions of steps  
crosses every border on the map

Say the poem you are  
flies home again  
without ever having left



# How To Remember You're Alive Ash Kilback

---

*Love, come here.*

Let's take a walk. I want to show you what you've been missing while you've been too busy to slow down to watch the sky open its curtains to the first song of morning.

*Love, look around.*

There is so much to see with patient and curious eyes. The flowers will bloom from the branches soon, the humming of bees too, please lift your chin, tilt your gaze towards beauty.

*Love, take off your shoes.*

Feel the grass between your toes, stand on this green carpet of earth as the wind twirls around your feet, sink your heels in the dirt, call every lost part of yourself back home.

*Love, get quiet.*

Listen to the water flowing down the river. Watch as it grows wide, then narrow, and wide again. Welcoming every unexpected turn it makes, not worrying where it will lead. Trust your life is carrying you the same.

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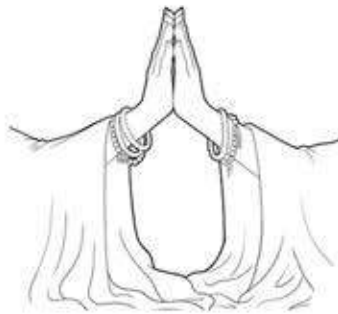
# How To Remember You're Alive Ash Kilback

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*continued*

*Love, come here.*

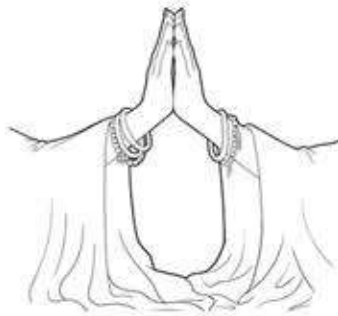
Let's sit beneath the trees. Send our thoughts up to the passing clouds and stay inside this moment for as long as we can, the world is always in a hurry, but we are more alive than ever when we're not.



# Begin Again Laura Coleman

---

To begin again,  
What a beautiful gift we are given,  
This choosing to be free.  
To begin again each sunrise,  
To release it all at dusk,  
To bow to the breath,  
To embrace the struggle,  
To love, to love, to love  
All of it - as it is.



# It Could Be Julia Fehrenbacher

---

a smile or a poem. Or new day light  
that finds you through an open  
window. Or, perhaps, remembering  
that tomorrow was never promised.

It could be the scent  
of baking bread, the first chill  
of autumn that has you reaching  
for your favorite wool sweater. Or maybe  
it's the noticing of how easily  
red maple becomes and lets go.

It could be taking today off  
to be still, to un-know,  
to notice. To practice loosening  
your troubled grip  
because grace can never  
be gripped or grabbed.

It could be choosing  
softness in a world grown hard  
because you're tired of hurting  
and being hurt and mercy  
is the best kind of medicine.

It could be an invitation to gather  
around the listening table  
where every color is beautiful, where  
there is no blame,  
no shame, no them—no other.

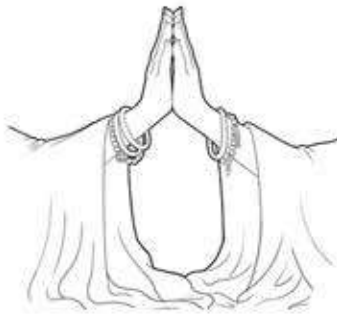
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# It Could Be Julia Fehrenbacher

*continued*

It could be  
It could be any of these things  
or no thing at all, that remind you that, really,  
only a few things matter—

Food. Trees. Words. Love. Mostly love.



If you feel called, choose a line (or even a single word) that especially speaks to you from my above poem.

Grab your notebook and a free-flowing, yummy pen, set your timer for 10 minutes (or whatever time feels best) and write yourself wildly free!

Let's come back to the breath . . . .

Pause here . . . .



## BONUS SECTION...

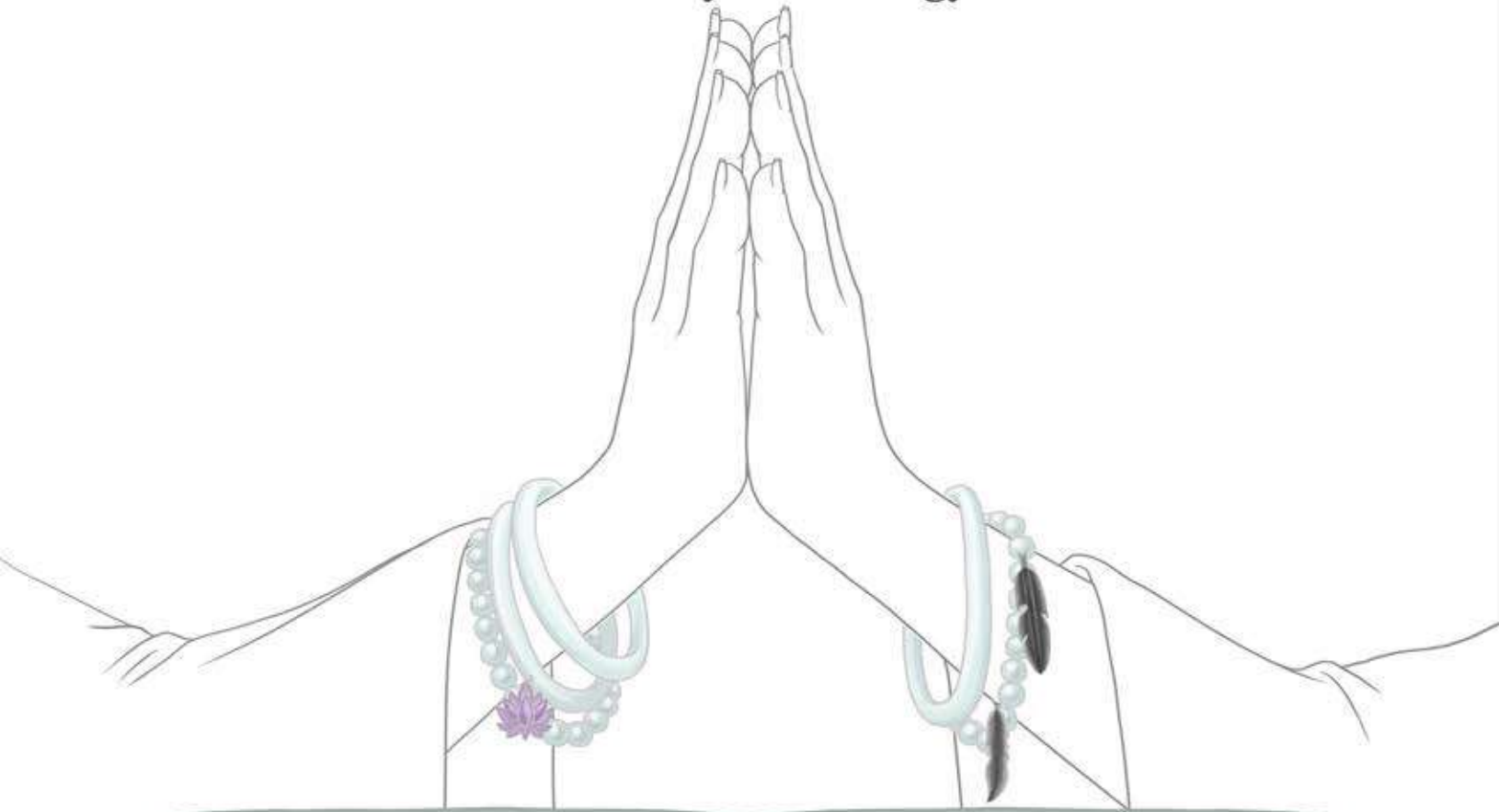
What follows is a generous offering from Dr. Darcy Lord,  
Self-Love Expert . . . .

"The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice"



# INTENTION OF LOVE

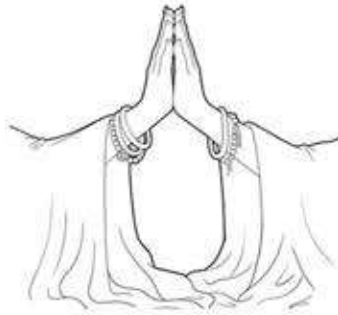
A Poetry Anthology



**BONUS SECTION:**  
**"The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice"**  
**By Dr. Darcy Lord, Self-Love Expert**

# The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice Dr. Darcy Lord

It's an honor to share space with the other writers in this collection, and especially to be part of ZenJen Brown's continuing journey of lighting the path of love and healing for so many. The Intention of Love? What a powerful concept! I truly believe love can heal all things – even situations on the planet that look unsolvable. But we must start with ourselves, because we are the vessels through which love must pour. In honor of that knowing, here are the 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice. May they guide our way to remembering the sacred essence of light and love that is our true nature.



## Principle #1 for Self-Love Practice:



# Rescue Yourself When You Feel Bad

To love yourself is to honor the deep sacredness of your soul, hold yourself precious within your own heart, and treat yourself with the same kindness you bestow on others. To do that you must learn to care about how you feel – the same way you care about how others feel – and then to rescue yourself when you feel bad. When you care about how you feel, you will work to change situations that drain you, deplete you, or make you feel bad. In order to do that, you get to first learn to be present with your body and emotions, noticing how you feel.

One of the most unkind, unloving things many of us do is never slow down enough to notice how we're doing. We rush from one thing to another, rarely turning our attention inward – selfward – enough to notice how we are doing.

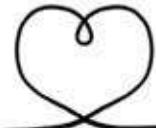
*How are you doing right now?*

As you read this, slow down for a moment and check in with you. Take a deep breath and then invite yourself to notice anything and everything you can about your body. Are you comfortable or uncomfortable? Does your body feel tired or tight anywhere? Or at ease? How's the temperature for you? Too warm, too cold, or just right? Do you need to use the restroom, or have some water or nutritious food?

Next, check your breath. Where can you feel it? In your nose? Mouth? Belly? Chest? Watch it for a few rounds and see what can you notice about its flow?

Now shift to your emotions. How do you feel emotionally right now? Any negative or depleting emotions like feeling anxious, self-critical, annoyed, sad, overwhelmed, frustrated, hurried? Or any of the positive or renewing emotions like peaceful, grateful, loving, happy, at-ease, proud, compassionate?

# Principle #1 for Self-Love Practice:



*continued*

## Rescue Yourself When You Feel Bad

*There's nothing wrong with negative emotions.* They help make up our human experience, and all emotions – even the negative ones – offer gifts and play a part in the richness and depth of our lives. It's also true, however, that *negative emotions are depleting – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.* Fortunately, it is possible to shift our emotions “On Demand” which is what Principle #1 is all about.

Once you have felt, processed, or had enough of a negative emotion, you can help yourself stop feeling bad. When you decide you care about how you feel, you will be inspired to rescue yourself from feeling bad by shifting away from draining emotions.

In every moment, you have the power to soften your pain and shift away from hurtful, depleting, or painful moments.

There are many ways to put Principle #1 (Rescue Yourself When You Feel Bad) into practice. Here is a 2-step practice to get you started.

Step 1: Place your hand on your heart and say 3 times aloud: “I’m willing to care about how I feel and rescue myself when I feel bad.”

Step 2: Answer this question, “What is one small, doable thing I have access to in the moment that could help me feel better?” And then do it! Here are some examples to help get you started: Take a few deep breaths? Text someone that you need support? Walk outside and look at something in nature? Write down 3 things you’re grateful for? Turn on a song you love and sing along or dance to it? Tell someone “Thank you for asking, but no”? Forgive yourself for not being perfect? Do something nice for someone else? Look in the mirror and smile at yourself? Give yourself a big hug and say, “I love you sweet girl” or “I love you sweet boy”?



## Principle #2 for Self-Love Practice:

### Make Your Inner Guidance Your Highest Authority

You have an ever-present inner guidance that is always within you, always available, and is always guiding you toward your highest good! Whether you call it the still small voice, Mother/Father God, your intuition, Universe vibes, Higher Self, Spirit, Source, Inner Being, or something else... it's always there and Principle #2 invites you to make it your *highest authority*!

So many of us got pulled away from noticing and trusting our inner guidance. We learned to substitute messages from parents, teachers, coaches, religious traditions, friends, spouses, and others in place of the messages from our own inner guidance.

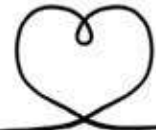
Growing up in an alcoholic home, I relied on being the “good girl” to get everyone’s love and approval. Instead of aligning with my spiritual knowing, at a young age I learned to make most of my choices based on wanting *other people* to approve of me and love me.

I’m still working on releasing the habit of wanting everyone to love me, and *never disapprove of me, or be mad at me* (ewww, right?) – for me to feel safe and worthy.

The practice of listening to my own inner guidance has been a huge part of unhooking from the need to get everyone else’s approval. How about you? How did you first give up listening to your inner guidance? Who or what did you put in its place to get your answers, safety, love, or approval?

Luckily, there’s no need to fight with or be mad at yourself (or others) about it. The fact is that at some point most of us got more comfortable getting our guidance, approval, and love from outside ourselves. The beautiful thing is that your own inner guidance – whatever you like to call it – will never go away. And it can never be silenced!

## Principle #2 for Self-Love Practice:



*continued*

# Make Your Inner Guidance Your Highest Authority

It's time to open to your inner guidance again and learn to trust that living your happiest life comes from making those inner inklings your highest authority. Your inner guidance knows all the answers you need, no matter the question, challenge, or problem. It's always talking to you about how to get from where you are to where you want to be, and about how precious, lovable, valuable, and worthy you are!

No matter how long it's been since you've tuned into your inner guidance, the *moment* you turn your awareness within with a willingness to connect with it, you will have access to messages, inklings, intuitive knowing, support, love, and assistance of all kinds!

To get started putting Principle #2 (Make Your Inner Guidance Your Highest Authority) ask yourself these questions and write down your answers even if you're "sure" you're "just making it up":

“What has the Universe been trying to tell me?”

“If I wasn't scared, what do I know it's time for me to do?”

“What is my soul calling me to know?”

By the way, even if you just jot down your answers on a piece of scrap paper – the power really is in writing it down.



## Principle #3 for Self-Love Practice:



### Offer Yourself Kind Words and Kind Actions

Think about the kinds of words you use with people you love, especially with a best friend or when talking to a young child. “Hi sweetheart!” “You’re awesome!” “Great job!” “You’re a good kid!” “Nicely done!” “You got this!” “I love you!” “I’m so proud of you!” “You’re such a dear!” “Thanks for making me laugh!” “I pick you!” “I’m grateful you’re in my life!” “Bless you!” “You’re so good!”

Feel what happens when you read those. They feel good! Children love to hear those affirming messages, *and you still have a little child inside you*. We *all* still have a little kid inside us that loves to be seen, appreciated, and talked to with those same types of kind, happy, uplifting words.

You can choose to start saying kind things to yourself, even if it feels unfamiliar, silly, or weird. You can choose to say kind things to yourself even if you don’t believe those things (yet!). As you move forward on this journey to loving yourself in bigger, bolder ways, decide today to stop waiting for others to offer you kind, affirming words, and instead start offering them to yourself.

Read the below phrases as if talking to yourself. If it’s easier, you can imagine you are talking to a younger version of you. The intention is simply to be kind to you. Put your hands on your heart and speak these words aloud to yourself.

Say:

“Hi sweetheart...”

“You’re awesome...”

“You’re a good kid...”

“Great job...”

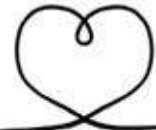
“Nicely done...”

“You got this...”

“I love you...”

“I’m so proud of you...”

## Principle #3 for Self-Love Practice:



continued

### Offer Yourself Kind Words and Kind Actions

“You’re such a dear...”  
“Thanks for making me laugh...”  
“I pick you...”  
“I’m grateful you’re in my life...”  
“Bless you...”  
“You’re so good...”

Along with using kind words, Self-Love Principle #3 guides you to take “kind” actions. That doesn’t always mean actions that “feel good.” Sometimes they are the same, but sometimes they are different! There are “real life” things that must be done. Taking *kind* actions will help you get to those things because your inner guidance knows where you are, where you want to be, what you need to do, and the best way to do it.

In addition to the loving affirmations you just said out loud, a beautiful way to put Principle #3 (Offer Yourself Kind Words and Kind Actions) into action, deciding which actions (or non-actions) are kind, is by using others as your template. What action would you want your child to take? Which action do you wish your best friend or spouse would pick? If they were in the same circumstance as you, which actions do you wish they would choose to be kind and loving to themselves?

After thinking through the above questions, ask yourself:

“IF I chose to be kind to myself, what do I need right now?”  
“What is one kind action I could take right now?”

Now follow one of your answers!



## Principle #4 for Self-Love Practice:



# Practice Self-Compassion and Self-Celebration

When something bad happens to someone else, we show them compassion; when something good happens to someone else, we celebrate them; when something bad happens to us, we're often hard on ourselves; when something good happens to us, we downplay it.

Principle #4 (Practice Self-Compassion and Self-Celebration) remedies this soul-squishing habit with this simple guidance: when you experience a situation that feels bad in any way, it's time for self-compassion. If something feels good, it's time for self-celebration.

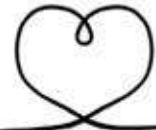
There's a simple way to put this principle into action. When something painful or difficult happens to someone you care about, what kinds of words do you use with them? Maybe, "I'm so sorry that happened," "If you need me I'm here," "I'm sorry sweetheart," "I love you," "Is there anything I can do?" "I'm sorry you're hurting," "I'm surrounding you in big love and light," "That really sucks," "What do you need right now?"

And with your actions maybe you'd let them tell you about the situation and not judge them for it, or maybe you'd just be present with them giving them space to feel however they feel, or give them a hug or a squeeze on the shoulder, or text or call them, or just sit quietly beside them, or ask them what they need.

To practice self-compassion, use those same words and attitudes toward yourself when you experience a painful, depleting, or difficult moment.

Are you feeling emotionally exhausted? Are you being self-critical? Are you worried about something? Did you mess something up? Are you mad at your body?

## Principle #4 for Self-Love Practice:



*continued*

# Practice Self-Compassion and Self-Celebration

Anytime you have a painful or challenging day, place your hands on your heart and say to yourself some of the compassionate phrases you might use with someone else.

Say:

“I’m sorry you’re feeling bad. I love you.”

“What do you need from me?”

“I’m so sorry sweetheart. You’re going to get through this.”

“May I give myself the compassion that I need.”

What about when things are going well? You completed a task; you’re having a good day; you’re proud of yourself for completing a project; you know you’re a great mom/friend/spouse; you got through a tough day, etc. Place your hands on your heart and give yourself some kudos!

Say:

“You rock sweetheart!”

“Well done!”

“I’m really proud of you!”

Principle #4 for Self-Love Practice reminds you that moment by moment you can practice either self-compassion or self-celebration – the same way you offer compassion or words of celebration so generously to others you find precious, valuable, lovable, and worthy!



## Principle #5 for Self-Love Practice:

### Hold Yourself Accountable and Let Yourself Off the Hook

To practice self-love, you must be willing to balance holding yourself accountable with letting yourself off the hook.

Sometimes the most self-loving thing is to hold yourself accountable by taking action steps. We're humans and we need to get things done – even if we're nervous about it, or tired, or in the pouty little kid mode that I can get in that says, "I just don't *wanna* do it."

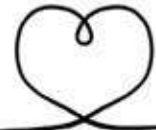
Are you procrastinating on something you feel is important? Are you sticking your head in the sand about something your inner guidance is calling you to do? Are you doing less important tasks while the big, important thing is staying undone?

Those are wonderful guideposts telling you it's time to hold yourself accountable and *take some action!* Get started with baby steps. You can do it! If you know it's time for you to hold yourself accountable, but you feel scared or stuck, try any of these:

1. If there's a project you're procrastinating on... set your phone timer for 10 minutes (not more!). Do something on that project, but only for 10 minutes.
2. If someone you loved said to you, "I'm procrastinating, and I need your help. Will you work with me to figure out what I can do to get started?" Imagine your inner child is asking you the question. What would you say to her/him/them?
3. Close your eyes and say to your inner guidance, "I think I'm supposed to hold myself accountable right now. How can I do that? What is my very next small step to do?"

Yes, we need to hold ourselves accountable and get things done!

## Principle #5 for Self-Love Practice:



*continued*

# Hold Yourself Accountable and Let Yourself Off the Hook

And... I promise that sometimes the self-loving thing to do is let yourself off the hook regarding something you've been trying to energetically wrestle to the ground.

Have you had times when you've been taking action steps, but nothing is working? Or you feel energetically beaten up from all the effort? Or you're having to make yourself do something and it all feels clunky and hard?

I call that "mush doggie" mode and it's exhausting. It's also a sign that it's time to let yourself off the hook. Not forever. Maybe not even for long. But for some moments.

If it's time for you to let yourself off the hook, but you're not sure how to do that, here are a few ways to practice letting yourself off the hook.

1. If there's a project you're spending more time and energy on than you know is balanced or healthy... say aloud, "Done is better than perfect," and bring it to closure... *imperfectly*.
2. If there is something you're only doing because someone else thinks you should be doing it... consider letting it go completely (yes, even if it's a job or relationship).
3. Bring to mind something you know you messed up. Take a big breath and say, "I don't like that I messed this up, but just like everyone, I'm doing the best I can."





You're doing beautifully! You're already enough! You're already doing it right!

When you utilize the 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice you'll be living The Intention of Love by transforming your own life and helping uplift everyone else too. Amen.



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In addition to her beloved Zenful Conversations community, podcast, and publication, ZenJen Brown is an internationally certified C-IAYT Yoga Therapist, meditation instructor, energy Reiki Master, and Teacher of Presence. She loves poetry, and anyone who puts their heart on the page. ZenJen creates warm, accessible spaces for healing, writing, and reflection. Her work is rooted in love, simplicity, and the belief that we walk each other home.

“There is a voice that doesn’t  
use words. Listen.”

- Rumi



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